J Fie Watt

THE

TRAGEDIES

OF

SOPHOCLES.

THE

TRAGEDIES

OF

SOPHOCLES.

THE

TRAGEDIES

OF

SOPHOCLES;

TRANSLATED

BY R. POTTER.

A NEW EDITION.

LONDON:

PRINTED BY AND FOR N. BLISS.

—

1820.

THE

TRAGEDIES

OF

SOPHOCLES;

TRANSLATED

BY R. POTTER.

A NEW EDITION.

LONDON:

PRINTED BY AND FOR N. BLISS.

1820.

PREFACE.

SOPHOCLES, the son of Sophilus an Athenian, was born at Colonus, and educated with great attention. Superior vigour and address in the exercises of the Palestra, and skill in Music, were the great accomplishments of young men in the states of Greece; in these Sophocles excelled; nor was he less distinguished by the beauty of his person. He was also instructed in the noblest of all sciences, Civil Polity and Religion; from the first of these he derived an unshaken love of his country, which he served in some embassies, and in high military command with Pericles; from the latter he was impressed with a pious reverence for the gods, manifested by the inviolable integrity of his life. But his studies were early devoted to the Tragic Muse; the spirit of Æschylus lent a fire to his genius, and excited that noble emulation which led him to contend with, and sometimes to bear away the prize from his great master. He wrote one hundred and thirteen tragedies, of which seven

only have escaped the ravages of time; and having testified his love of his country by refusing to leave it, though invited by many kings, and having enjoyed the uninterrupted esteem and affection of his fellow citizens, which neither the gallant actions and sublime genius of Æschylus, nor the tender spirit and philosophic virtue of Euripides could secure to them, he died in the ninety-first year of his age. The burial-place of his ancestors was at Decelia, which the Lacedemonians had at that time seized and fortified; but Lysander, the Spartan Chief, permitted the Athenians to inter their deceased Poet; and they paid him all the honours due to his love of his country, his integrity of life, and his high poetic excellence.

Æschylus had at once seized the highest post of honour in the field of Poetry, the true Sublime; to that eminence his claim could not be disputed. Sophocles had a noble elevation of mind, but tempered with so fine a taste and so chastised a judgment, that he never passes the bounds of propriety; under his conduct the Tragic Muse appears with the chaste dignity of some noble matron at a religious solemnity; harmony is in her voice, and grace in all her motions. From him the theatre received some additional embellishments, and the drama, what made it more active and more interesting, the introduction of a third Speaker: but his distinguishing excellence is in the judicious disposition of the fable, and so nice a connexion and

dependence of the parts on each other, that they all agree to make the event not only probable, but even necessary; this is peculiarly admirable in his Œdipus King of Thebes; and in this important point he is far superior to every other dramatic writer.

Aristotle, who formed his judgment from the three great Athenian Poets, particularly from Sophocles, observes that Tragedy after various changes, having now attained the perfection of its nature, aimed at no further improvements. The latter part of the observation was at that time just; it continued just more than two thousand years; but of perfection who shall decide? The great Critic did not conceive that Nature could produce a Poet who, without any knowledge of his laws, or of those Grecian models, should exalt Tragedy to an excellence of which neither he nor they had any idea. Shakespeare had a genius ardent and sublime as that of Æschylus, his diction is equally great and daring, his imagination was richer and more luxuriant, his observation of the living manners and his knowledge of the human mind more comprehensive; hence his wonderful power over the passions. It is a proof of the commanding force of genius that, as the Agamemnon of Æschylus, with all its faults, excels any thing that remains to us of the Grecian drama, so there are many tragedies of Shakespeare, though with more and greater faults, which are superior to the Aga-

memnon. Nature may yet produce another Poet blest with the powers of Shakespeare and the judgment of Sophocles ; and the Critic, who shall see this, may then say with Aristotle, " Tragedy " has now attained the perfection of its nature :" in the mean time we glory in our countryman, and look back with reverence on the three great Poets of Athens. The sublime and daring Æschylus resembles some strong and impregnable Castle situated on a rock, whose martial grandeur awes the beholder, its embattlements defended by heroes in arms, and its gates proudly hung with trophies. Sophocles appears with splendid dignity, like some imperial palace of richest architecture, the symmetry of whose parts, and the chaste magnificence of the whole delight the eye, and command the approbation of the judgment. The pathetic and moral Euripides hath the solemnity of a Gothic Temple, whose storied windows admit a dim religious light, enough to show us its high embowed roof, and the monuments of the dead which rise in every part, impressing our minds with pity and terror at the uncertain and short duration of human greatness, and with an awful sense of our own mortality.

In works of literature the public is little interested in the motives of the writer ; yet some account of this translation may be necessary : it was often requested of me immediately after the publication of Euripides ; but I wished to leave Dr. Franklin

in the undisturbed possession of his well-acquired reputation, and declined the attempt, till a person of illustrious rank, and more illustrious for mental accomplishments, did me the honour to desire that I would give the English reader all that remains of the Tragic Muse of Greece; a request from such a person, and the manner in which it was communicated to me, could not be refused. I undertook the work as a task, sensible of its difficulty, and even despairing of my power to express the propriety, the sweetness, the harmony, the force, and the dignity of Sophocles: as I advanced, I was not wholly dissatisfied with myself; from a task it became an amusement, and then a pleasure to me. This translation professes to be faithful to the original; and I flatter myself that it is in no small degree correct; this it owes to a learned friend, who did me the favour to revise it; with his taste and judgment I am well acquainted, and I confide in his integrity. My own attention and exertions have not been wanting, as it has been my ambition to make it worthy of the noble person to whom it owes its existence, and of the public to which it is now presented.

SCARNING,

February 18, 1788.

ŒDIPUS

KING OF THEBES.

ŒDIPUS KING OF THEBES.

The polished citizens of Athens applauded this tragedy; and it has been universally esteemed as the most perfect composition that ever graced their theatre; the judgment of Aristotle and of the best critics hath justified this general approbation. The reader will observe the wonderful conduct of the poet. The judicious preservation of the Unities, to use the language of criticism, produces such a propriety, such a connexion and dependence of what follows on what is past, that every circumstance seems to arise from the nature of things, and impresses on the mind the idea of reality. The discovery that Œdipus is himself the person darkly hinted at by the oracle, the nice gradations by which this discovery is carried on, the alternate light and shade thrown over it, from the ambiguous answers of Tiresias to his clearer declarations, from the encouragement to the alarms which he receives from Jocasta, from the momentary conviction of its impossibility given him by the Corinthian to the full evidence of the fact, keep the mind in awful suspense, till the distressing certainty breaks in upon it at once, and overwhelms it with terror and pity. This drama resembles an

eruption of mount Ætna; at first clouds of smoke darken the sky; these are dispelled by a dreadful explosion of flames; then the threatening symptoms abate; thus smoke and flame and serenity succeed each other, till the mountain in an instant discharges its torrent fires, which rush down with resistless fury, roll over palaces, temples, and cities, and carry with them deflagration, ruin, and horror.

Aristotle observes that in the most excellent tragedy, which should be imitative of what produces terror and pity, persons illustrious for their good qualities ought not to be represented as fallen from a prosperous to an adverse fortune; for this would raise neither terror nor pity; but lead to impiety. Poetic. c. xiii. The precept has been controverted, perhaps with reason; yet critics have taken occasion to show how faithfully the poet has adhered to this rule, by charging Œdipus with impiety, pride, choler, violence, and intemperate curiosity. It may not therefore be improper to examine this character, as it is drawn by Sophocles. At the first appearance of Œdipus we are warmly interested in his favour; he is an illustrious and honoured king; anxious for the welfare of his realms, and prizing it more than his own life; his addresses to the oracle at Delphi, his attention to the answers of the god, and the respect with which he receives Tiresias, are undoubted indications of his piety. As a king, he is the benevolent father of his people; as a man, generous, intrepid, and wise; as

an husband, affectionate and mild; as a father, tender as the pathetic pencil of Euripides could have pourtrayed him. His anxious endeavours to discover the murderer of Laius are occasioned at first partly by his reverence of the oracle, and partly by his own sense of justice; his further inquiries proceed from a delicate and exquisite sensibility. The poet, to attain his end, has judiciously blended this with a certain "fiery quality," which blazes out on every occasion; and, though it shows a generous rather than a ferocious mind, naturally leads him into every ill, which the oracle and his destiny had rendered inevitable; for as this instigated his abrupt departure from Corinth, so it inflamed his resentment of the insult offered him in the narrow road "where three ways met;" from which fatal encounter all his misfortunes arose; yet even in this, the barbarous manners of the times considered, he is to be deemed unfortunate rather than criminal. His anger against Tiresias was excited by the prophet's refusal to declare the guilty person; he considered his silence as injurious to himself and to his country; his anger therefore arose from a generous motive: when at length Tiresias was provoked to speak, and pronounced Œdipus himself to be the murderer, conscious of his innocence, (for he then thought himself innocent), abhorring the malignity of the accusation, and persuaded from concurring circumstances that the prophet had been suborned by Creon, the one must appear to him as an impostor and a merce-

nary wretch, the other as a dark designing villain, who had fabricated this charge to deprive him of his crown and his life: he is enraged, but not inexorable; at the intercession of his friends, even whilst he is under this persuasion, he dismisses Creon with impunity. "The stroke, that inflicts "the deepest wound on a virtuous and ingenuous "nature, is the accusation of guilt." Richardson on the character of Imogen. As circumstances were continually opening, which gave this accusation an increasing force that alarmed even his own mind, neither nature nor reason could suffer a person of so animated a spirit to rest, till he had drawn aside the mysterious veil, and discovered all the horrors of his fate.

Where then was the guilt of Œdipus? We are to look for it not in his conduct, but in his fate. He was, as Seneca finely expresses it, *Phœbi reus.* Before his birth Apollo had foretold that he should murder his father and marry his mother; and his destiny led him, against every effort of a virtuous mind, involuntarily and unknowingly to accomplish the oracle; and, what is still worse, he was equally obnoxious not only to human, but even to Divine justice, as if he had committed these crimes with a daring and impious intention. Such was the religious belief of Athens even in the days of Socrates: we have little cause to think our reasoning powers stronger, but we feel our understandings more enlightened than were those of the Grecian

Sages. We know whence we received this light, let us therefore be thankful for it.

The scene is at Thebes before the palace of Œdipus.

PERSONS OF THE DRAMA.

ŒDIPUS

PRIEST OF JUPITER

CREON

TIRESIAS

JOCASTA

CORINTHIAN

HERDSMAN

MESSENGER

CHORUS, SENATORS OF THEBES.

ŒDIPUS

KING OF THEBES.

1...15

ŒDIPUS, THEBANS.

ŒDIP. WHY, O my sons, ye youthful progeny
Of Cadmus old, why have you here your seats
Holding these suppliant boughs, whilst incense fumes
Through all the town, and sacred songs and cries
Resound? No vulgar messenger I send,
But deem it worthy the illustrious name
Of Œdipus to learn the cause of this
In person. Speak then thou, whose reverend age
Claims this respect; inform me what your state,
Your fears or sufferings; in each point my will
Is prompt to succour: ruthless were my heart,
Did it not melt with pity at this sight.

PRIEST of JUPITER.

Sovereign of Thebes, imperial Œdipus,
Thou seest us what we are, who sit thus low
Before thy altars; some whose unfledged wings

L. 15. Οὐδίπω μακρὰν πτέσθαι σθένοντις. Metaphora ab avium pullis implumibus. Burton, a Scholiaste.

Bear them not far; and some who bend beneath
The weight of age, Priests these, myself the Priest
Of Jupiter; and some, the noblest youths,
The flow'r of Thebes. Her other sons arranged
Along the forum hold their suppliant boughs,
And at Minerva's temples, and the shrine
Prophetic nigh Ismenus: for the state,
Thine eyes behold it, labours in the storm,
Unable from the blood-stain'd wave to rear
Her head: her opening buds unfruitful fall,
Scorch'd by the baneful blasts: her pastured herds
Perish, her infants perish ere the birth.
Incumbent o'er the town destructive hangs
The fiery pestilence, beneath whose force
Thebes becomes desolate; with sighs and groans
Mean while the gloomy Pluto is enrich'd.
Now at thy altars sit I, and these youths,
Not that we deem thee equal to the gods,
But 'midst th' afflicting accidents of life,
Or sufferings sent from heav'n, the first of men.
For thou at Thebes arriving didst redeem
The city from the tribute which we paid
To the harsh-screaming monster, not inform'd
By us, or counsell'd; no, with higher thought
We deem thee by some god inspired to raise
Our state to life. And now, most potent king,
Thus prostrate at thy feet we all implore
Thy aid; for our distress find some relief,
Attending to some god's oracular voice,
Or by some sage instructed; for I see
The counsels of th' experienced give fresh life

L. 21. Two temples at Thebes were consecrated to Minerva under the titles of Oncæa, and Ismenia. Apollo had a temple on the banks of Ismenus; from the flames and ashes of its altar his priests drew prophecies.

E'en in calamities. Thou best of men,
Go on, th' afflicted city once more raise;
Go on, and prudence be thy guide. Since now
This country for thy former generous deeds
Hails thee as her preserver, of thy reign
Let us not hold this memory, that by thee
From ruin raised, by sad reverse at last
We sink in ruin; but once more this state
Restore to safety; as thou gavest us then
With happy auspices fair fortune, now
Be like thyself. More glorious wilt thou reign
O'er peopled, than o'er desolated realms:
The strong-ribb'd galley, and the rampired tow'r,
Their martial youth if wanting, nought avail.

ŒDIP. O my lamented sons, for ills well known
To me you seek redress; I know that grief
Hangs heavy on you all, but most on me:
His private sufferings each bewails; but I
Mourn for the city, for myself, and you.
I want no voice to rouse me; many tears
These eyes have pour'd, with many anxious thoughts
My breast has labour'd, tracing various ways
For your relief. That, which alone could give
Hope of success, I follow'd; I have sent
Creon, whose veins are rich with royal blood,
Son of Menœceus, to the Pythian shrine
Of Phœbus, to inquire what I must do
To save this city. As I number back
The days since past, I marvel; for his stay
Exceeds just expectation. When he comes,
If I perform not what the god directs,
May I be deem'd the vilest of mankind.

PR. Of happy presage are thy words: these youths
Show me that Creon hither bends his steps.

ŒDIP. Royal Apollo, may he bring success
And safety, as it brightens in his eye!
PR. Cheerful indeed his aspect; else his head
With wreaths of laurel had not thus been crown'd.
ŒDIP. Soon shall we know; he now may be address'd.

ŒDIPUS, CREON, THEBANS.

ŒDIP. Son of Menœceus, to the royal blood
Allied, what answer bring'st thou from the god?
CR. Of good I have to tell thee: all our ill
May, if directed well, find happy end.
ŒDIP. Relate his words distinctly; for thy speech
Nor gives me confidence, nor wakes my fears.
CR. By these encircled wou'dst thou hear, I stand
Ready to speak, or to retire apart.
ŒDIP. Speak to them all; for dearer than my life
I prize the means to remedy their grief.
CR. Then let me speak what from the god I heard.
The royal Phœbus gave us clear command
Hence the pollution of our realm to drive,
Now nourish'd in the bosom of the land,
Nor cherish an immedicable ill.
ŒDIP. What the offence? the expiation what?
CR. By exile, or by death avenging death;
For this blood desolates the suffering land.
ŒDIP. At whose disastrous fortune doth this point?
CR. Once, ere the empire of this state was thine,
Laius, O king, was sovereign lord of Thebes.
ŒDIP. This from the voice of fame hath reach'd my ears,
But Laius never did mine eyes behold.
CR. His death the god with no ambiguous voice
Commands us on his murderers to avenge.

L. 84. See the Hippolytus of Euripides, l. 850. n.

ŒDIP. Where are they? By what methods may be found
The faint-mark'd footsteps of this long-past guilt?
CR. This country holds them, said the god. Pursuit
May overtake what through neglect escapes.
ŒDIP. Beneath some roof, or in the open fields,
Or in some foreign land was Laius slain?
CR. Hence to consult the oracle he went,
And never to his royal house return'd.
ŒDIP. Did none return, none of his train, who saw
His death, of whom inquiry may be made?
CR. All fell, save one; who, flying wild with fear,
Of what he saw one thing alone could tell.
ŒDIP. Say what; for one thing, if we gain a gleam
Of hope, may lead us to discover more.
CR. That, met by ruffians, not by one man's force
He fell, but by a numerous band oppress'd.
ŒDIP. How should the ruffian, if not bribed with gold
From hence, presume t' attempt this daring deed?
CR. Not unsuspected this: but 'midst our ills
None to avenge the death of Laius rose.
ŒDIP. What pressing ill, your monarch murder'd thus,
Restrain'd you, that inquiry was not made?
CR. The dark-descanting Sphinx from things unseen
Forced our attention to more instant ills.
ŒDIP. But I will bring them into light again
From their first cause. Of Phœbus for the dead
This zeal is worthy, worthy too of thee;
And me confederate in the same just cause
You shall behold; this country and the god
I will avenge. Not for some distant friend,

L. 140. There is some little obscurity here. Œdipus had declared his purpose to engage in this inquiry for the relief of his country, and in concurrence with the god. He now mentions an additional motive, which more nearly concerned himself; it was the common cause of royalty. The ruf-

But for myself, this execrable guilt
Be it my care to crush: for the same hand,
That murder'd him, may soon be raised to plunge
With the same rage the falchion in my breast;
Therefore avenging him I guard myself.
But rise, my children, from your lowly seats
With speed, and bear these suppliant branches hence.
Hither th' assembled sons of Thebes convene:
My pow'r shall be exerted; and once more
Will we, confiding in the favouring god,
Together prosper, or together fall.

PR. Let us arise, my sons: our sovereign grants
The grace we came to ask; and may the god,
Who sent this answer from his hallow'd shrine,
Preserve us, and this wasting pest avert!

CHOR. Thou oracle of Jove, what fate
From Pytho's golden shrine
Brings to th' illustrious Theban state
Thy sweet-breathed voice divine?
My trembling heart what terror rends,
While dread suspense on thee attends,

fian, that murdered Laius, might, if he were permitted to go unpunished, murder him. By τῶν ἀπωτέρω φίλων, "some distant friend," he points to Laius; the expression is indeed indefinite, but it was neither necessary nor proper that it should be more distinctly marked; with regard to Laius thus far Œdipus had been very cold and indifferent.

L. 156. Oracles were by the ancients ultimately referred to Jupiter. This prophetic power he gave to other deities whom he was disposed to grace; thus Æschylus, speaking of Apollo, says,

With his own sacred skill high Jove inspired
His raptured soul, and placed him on his throne,
The fourth prophetic god, whence now he gives
His father's oracles. THE FURIES.

O Delian Pæan, healing pow'r!
Daughter of golden Hope, to me,
Blest voice, what now dost thou decree,
Or in time's future hour?

Daughter of heav'n's almighty lord,
Immortal Pallas, hear!
And thou, Diana, queen ador'd,
Whose tutelary care
Protects these walls, this favour'd state,
Amidst this forum 'round whose seat
Sublime encircling pillars stand!
God of the distant-wounding bow,
Apollo, hear; avert our woe,
And save the sick'ning land!

This realm when former ills opprest
If your propitious pow'r
In mercy crush'd the baleful Pest
Outrageous to devour;
In mercy now extend your care,
For all is misery and despair,
And vain the counsels of the wise.
No fruit, no grain to ripeness grows;
The matron feels untimely throes,
The birth abortive dies.

The Shades, as birds of rapid flight,
In quick succession go,
Quick as the flames that flash through night,
To Pluto's realms below.
Th' unpeopled town beholds the dead
Wide o'er her putrid pavements spread,
Nor graced with tear or obsequy.

The altars round a mournful band,
The wives, the hoary matrons, stand,
And heave the suppliant sigh.

With deep sighs mix'd the hallow'd strain
Bursts fervent to the skies:
Deign then, O radiant Pallas, deign
In all thy might to rise.
From this fierce pow'r which raging round
Unarm'd inflicts thy fiery wound,
Daughter of Jove, my country save;
Hence, goddess, hence the fury sweep
To Amphitrite's chambers deep,
Or the rough Euxine wave!

Doth aught the Night from ruin spare?
The Morning's sickly ray,
Pregnant with death, inflames the air,
And gives disease its prey,
Father of gods, whose matchless force
Wings the red lightning's vengeful course,
With all thy thunders crush this foe!
Potent to aid, Lycéan king,
Thy shafts secure of conquest wing,
And bend thy golden bow!

Thy beams around, Diana, throw,
And pierce this gloom of night,
As on Lycæum's moss-clad brow
Thou pour'st thy silver light!
Thy nymphs, O Theban Bacchus lead,
The golden mitre round thy head,

L. 204. This is the language of poetry: such is the *myrtoum mare* and *mare criticum* of Horace.

Greef-soothing god of wine and joy;
Wave thy bright torch, and with its flame
This god, to gods an odious name,
This lurid Pest destroy!

ŒDIPUS, CHORUS.

ŒDIP. Well are thy vows address'd; nor vain those vows,
But of much force, and lenient of our ills,
Wou'dst thou with deep regard attend my words,
Which I, to each related circumstance
A stranger, and a stranger to the deed,
Shall speak; for far my search could not extend,
Having no mark to guide my steps. But now
A Theban late enroll'd, to all of Thebes
I give this charge. Whoe'er among you knows
By whom the son of Labdacus was slain,
Him I command t' unfold the whole to me.
But if, through conscious guilt, he fears t' avow
The deed, and charge himself; no harsher doom
Awaits him, than to leave this land, unhurt.
But if among you be a man, who knows
Another, of another realm, whose hand
Was with this blood polluted, let him speak,
And not conceal the murderer; for from me
Ample shall be his recompense, and thanks
Added besides. But if ye will not speak,
If fearing for himself, or for a friend,
There be a man that disregards my words,
What then shall be my solemn mandate hear.
That man let none within this realm, whose throne,
Whose empire I command, beneath his roof

L. 249. This severe sentence was usually denounced against a murderer: Œdipus in his zeal denounces it against the person who should conceal the murderer of Laius.

Receive, let none hold converse with him, none
Admit him at the altars of the gods
His vows, his offerings to partake, or share
The cleansing laver; from your houses all
Chase this pollution of our land; for thus
To me the Pythian oracle declared
Its will; thus therefore with the god I join
Confederate, and the dead. But on the wretch
Who did the deed, whether he lies conceal'd
A single ruffian, or with many leagued,
I imprecate this curse; his wretched days,
Cut off from all the social joys of life,
Let him wear out in misery. In my house
If I protect him, conscious of the deed,
May all these curses fall on me. The same
I charge on you; make you these solemn vows,
In zeal for me, for Phœbus, and this land
Thus of its fruits, and its protecting gods
Bereft. Nor ought we, though no voice divine
Impell'd us, unatoned to leave the blood
Of one so noble, of a monarch slain.
To trace this murderous deed my fortune now
Assigns to me, for mine the regal pow'r
Which once was his; his bed, his wife is mine;
Our children too, but that the adverse gods
Denied him children, had in common ties
Been close conjoin'd: but now disastrous fate
Hath burst upon his head. Therefore for him,
As for my father, vengeful will I rise,
Unwearied in th' attempt to find the man
That slew the son of Labdacus, whose blood
From Polydorus its illustrious stream
Derived, from Cadmus, and Agenor old.
To those who act not thus, I pray the gods
That the till'd earth may never yield its fruits,

And barren be their bed; beneath the ills,
Which now oppress us, let them waste, and feel
A fate yet more severe. But to the sons
Of Thebes, who with applause these things receive,
May justice join her aid, and all the gods
Be present always with propitious pow'r!

CHOR. As solemnly by thee adjured, O king,
So will I speak. I neither murder'd him,
Nor can disclose the murderer: to the god,
Who charged that this inquiry should be made,
Belongs it to declare who did the deed.

ŒDIP. Well hast thou said: but to compel the gods
Against their will no mortal man has pow'r.

CHOR. What more my thought suggests I would propose.

ŒDIP. Whate'er it be, forbear not thou to speak.

CHOR. Next to th' illustrious god I am assured
These things th' illustrious Seer, Tiresias, knows
Consulting him, O king, thou may'st obtain
In matters most obscure the clearest light.

ŒDIP. Nor this have I neglected, but have sent,
Twice sent, by Creon prompted, to require
His presence: strange and tedious his delay.

CHOR. Uncertain are the rumours spread of old.

ŒDIP. What are they? My regard each rumour claims.

CHOR. They say that by some travellers he fell.

ŒDIP. This I have heard; who saw it none can say.

CHOR. If fear can touch his heart, when he shall hear
Thy imprecations, he will shrink at them.

ŒDIP. The deed who fear'd not, will not shrink at words.

CHOR. Here comes who will convict him; for they lead
The reverend Seer, in whom, of mortal men
Alone, from inborn knowledge truth shines clear.

ŒDIPUS, TIRESIAS, CHORUS.

DIP. O sage Tiresias, whose enlighten'd mind

Notes all things, whether such as may be taught
To mortals, or require the sacred seal
Of silence, things of heav'n, or things of earth,
Though quench'd thy visual beam, yet not unknown
To thee the baleful pestilence that wastes
The city; from whose rage our sole relief,
Our sole defence, illustrious Seer, is found
In thee; for Phœbus, though perchance thine ear
His mandate hath not reach'd, thus gave response
To our inquiries, that this pest shall hence
Alone its ravage cease, if, clearly known
The murderers of Laius, we avenge
On them, by exile or by death, his blood.
Refuse not then, from what of augury
From birds on wing thou draw'st, or from aught else
Of thy prophetic art, to save thyself,
To save the city; save me too, and put
All the pollution of the dead away.
In thee are all our hopes: t' exert his pow'r
In doing good is man's most glorious task.

TIR. Alas, alas, how dreadful to be wise,
From wisdom when no profit is derived!
Mine is this knowledge, fatal to thy peace.
I should not then have come.

ŒDIP. What may this mean?
And why this gloomy sadness on thy brow?

TIR. Dismiss me to my house; thy ills more light
Wilt thou sustain, I mine, this grace obtain'd.

ŒDIP. Nor just, nor friendly to thy country thou,
Thus to deprive her of thy sage advice.

TIR. Nothing of good to thee thy speech, I see,
Portends: of ill productive be not mine.

CHOR. Now by the gods, whate'er thy wisdom knows
Suppress it not, we suppliant all implore.

TIR. For you are all unwise. Ne'er shall my voice

For this find utterance, nor disclose thy ills.

ŒDIP. To know, and not to speak! Implies not this
Treachery to us, and ruin to the realm?

TIR. My peace I will not hurt, nor thine. In vain
Why wilt thou urge? From me thou shalt not know.

ŒDIP. Thou vilest of the vile---for thou wou'dst raise
Th' insensate rock to rage---wilt thou not speak,
But show thyself unfeeling and unmoved?

TIR. My passion thou hast blamed; but dost not see
That which with thee resides, while me thou blamest.

ŒDIP. Who would not be enraged to hear thy words,
Which cast dishonour on this injured state?

TIR. These things will come, though silent be my voice.

ŒDIP. Then what will come, to me thou shou'dst disclose.

TIR. Further I will not speak; so let thy rage,
If such thy will, in all its fierceness rise.

ŒDIP. Then I will speak, as anger prompts my tongue,
Withuot reserve whate'er my thoughts suggest.
Know then I deem thee complice in this act;
I deem the deed was thine, save that thy hand
Struck not the blow: hadst thou enjoy'd thy sight,
I should pronounce the act were thine alone.

TIR. Indeed! Nay then I warn thee to abide
By thine own solemn charge, and from this day
Hold converse nor with these, nor me; for thou
Art the accurs'd polluter of this land.

ŒDIP. Hast thou no sense of shame, that thou hast dared
Utter such taunt? How think'st thou to escape?

TIR. I have escaped, e'en by the potent truth

L. 361. The obvious meaning of these words is, "Thou blamest my un-"complying perverseness, but art not sensible of thy own violent passions." Eustathius ingeniously supposes that Tiresias alludes to Jocasta: this perhaps is too great a refinement; but the prophet through this whole scene is dreadfully obscure.

Which I maintain.

ŒDIP. By whom hast thou been taught?
Not by thy art divine.

TIR. By thee, constrain'd
Unwillingly to speak.

ŒDIP. What? Speak the words
Again; my knowledge so will be more clear.

TIR. Were they abstruse? Or dost thou bid me speak
To try me?

ŒDIP. Not to speak it as a thing
Known; yet repeat thy words.

TIR. Again I say
Thou art the much-sought murderer of the king.

ŒDIP. Thou shalt not triumph for this second taunt.

TIR. More shalt I speak then, and enrage thee more?

ŒPID. Say what thou wilt, it will be said in vain.

TIR. I say flagitious is thy intercourse
With those most dear to thee; thou know'st not this,
Nor seest the ills in which thou art involved.

ŒDIP. Think'st thou no vengeance such reproach awaits?

TIR. I have no fear, if truth hath aught of pow'r.

ŒDIP. It hath, but not for thee; it is not thine;
Thy ears, thy soul, e'en as thine eyes, are blind.

TIR. Unhappy thou in thus reproaching me,
For soon on thee the same reproach shall fall.

ŒDIP. Confiding in thy blindness thou from me,
Or any that have eyes, no vengeance fearest.

TIR. To fall by thee is not my fate; those things
Belong to Phœbus; ample is his pow'r.

ŒDIP. The fiction this of Creon, or thine own?

TIR. Creon ne'er wrought thee ill: the work is thine.

ŒDIP. O greatness, empire, and thou noblest art
That giv'st to life its glory most desired,
What baleful envy on your splendour waits,

Since for this royal pow'r by me unsought,
But by the state presented a free gift,
The faithful Creon, who the first appear'd
My friend, with dark and secret malice works,
Wishing my ruin, and suborns this wretch,
This sorcerer, this artificer of wiles,
Whose trains delude the people, sharp of sight
To lucre only, to his science blind.
Where hast thou e'er display'd a prophet's skill?
Why, when the ravening hound of hell her charm
Mysterious chanted, for thy country wise
Didst thou not solve it? Of no vulgar mind
Was this the task; the prophet this required.
No knowledge then from birds didst thou receive,
None from the gods t' enfold it: but I came,
This nothing-knowing Œdipus, and quell'd
The monster, piercing through her dark device
By reason's force, not taught by flight of birds.
Yet dost thou now assay to drive me out,
Weening to have thy stand next Creon's throne.
But thou, and he who form'd this base design
With thee, shall feel my pow'r: but that thine age
Some reverence claims, thou shou'dst e'en now be taught,
And feel the madness of thine enterprise.

CHOR. If we conjecture right, his words burst forth
By passion dictated; and thine, O king,
No less: these things behove not; best advise
How to explore the answer of the god.

TIR. Thou art a king; yet I have equal right
To answer thee; this pow'r is mine; to these
I am no vassal; Phœbus is my lord:
Nor will I be enroll'd amongst those who wait
On Creon for support. I tell thee then,

Me since with taunts thou hast reviled as blind,
Thou hast indeed thine eyes, yet canst not see
What ills inclose thee round, nor where thou hast
Thy habitation, nor with whom thou livest.
Know'st thou who gave thee birth? Thou art a foe,
And know'st it not, to those allied to thee
Most closely, whom the realms beneath contain,
And who behold the light of heav'n. The curse
Of father and of mother on each side
With dreadful steps pursues thee, and ere long
Will chase thee from this land, now blest with sight,
Then blind. How will Cithæron, how each strand
Ere long re-echo to thy mournful cries,
When thou shalt know that, driv'n by swelling gales,
The port of marriage thou hast gain'd, thy bark
Where anchor cannot hold! The numerous train
Of other ills thou seest not which will rank
In the same line thee and thy sons alike.
Go to; with foul revilings Creon taunt,
And my true voice; yet thing more vile than thou
Is not 'mong mortals that shall e'er be crush'd.

ŒDIP. From him these piercing insults must I bear?
Perdition on thee! hence, away, begone.

TIR. I had not come, hadst thou not sent for me.

ŒDIP. I knew thee not in speech so void of sense,
Or here thy presence I had scarce required.

TIR. Such thou may'st deem my spirit, void of sense:
But they, who gave thee birth, esteem'd me wise.

ŒDIP. Who are they? Stay. Of those that breathe to whom
Owe I my birth?

TIR. Thy birth this day will show,
This day will show the horrors of thy fate.

ŒDIP. How dark, how full of mystery all thy words!

TIR. Such to unfold well suits thy piercing mind.
ŒDIP. My glory thou wou'dst turn to my reproach.
TIR. That glory hath brought ruin on thy head.
ŒDIP. If I have saved this realm, I reck not that.
TIR. Well then, I now depart. Boy, lead me hence.
ŒDIP. Ay, let him lead thee; for thy presence throws
Confusion on th' affairs that now engage
Our care: begone, and trouble us no more.
TIR. I go: but first will speak for what I came,
Nor dread thy frown; thy vengeance hath no pow'r
To touch my life. I tell thee that the man,
Whom thou hast sought, 'gainst whom thy solemn charge,
Thy threats have been proclaim'd, that man is here;
Of foreign birth now deem'd, his residence
Here fixing; but full soon he shall be found
A Theban born, nor in his fortune long
Rejoice; his visual ray in darkness quench'd,
His high state sunk to beggary, a staff
Shall to a foreign land his steps direct.
A brother and a father to his sons
Shall he appear; to her, that gave him birth,
A son and husband; to his father found
A rival and a murderer. Go thou in;
Muse on these things; say, if thou find them false,
No portion of a prophet's skill is mine.

L. 498. The word ὁμόσπορος signifies a man who has children by the same woman who had children by the other person mentioned; and this precise idea ought to be preserved in the translation; but how is this to be done? Adulter, incestus, do not convey this idea, yet such are the Latin versions; neither does the word *rival* reach it. A periphrasis here would be unpardonable, and our language affords no word of equal signification; the translator therefore feels himself in the same situation with the bad painter who drew a lion so vilely, that he was obliged to write LION under the picture, to inform the spectators what animal was intended.

CHORUS.

STRO. 1. All yet is dark. What wretch abhorr'd,
Grasping with blood-stain'd hand his ruthless sword,
From Delphi's high rock-seated shrine
Declares the voice divine
The author of this horrid deed?
Now let him wing his swiftest speed;
The son of Jove upon him flies,
Arm'd with the flames and lightenings of the skies:
Dreadful, resistless in their force
The Fates attend his course.

ANTIS. 1. The oracle divinely bright
To drag the latent murderer into light
Shone forth, Parnassus, from thy brow
White with eternal snow:
For, like a bull, to secret shades,
To rocks, to caves, to sylvan glades,
Far from the Pythian prophecies
Mournful the solitary wanderer flies:
In vain: they hover round his head,
And ceaseless terrors spread.

STRO. 2. Dreadful, dreadful things to hear
Utters the prophetic Seer.
Him doth truth, doth falsehood guide?
Fear and hope my soul divide;
Painful suspense! The present and the past
Darkening clouds alike o'ercast.
Was wrong by Laius done of old,
That made the son of Polybus his foe?
Such in no record is enroll'd;
Nought at this hour of proof I know,
Decreeing as the Seer decreed,
To charge on Œdipus the secret deed.

ANTIS. 2. Jove, high ruler of the skies,
And the Pythian god are wise;
They the deeds of mortals know,
All whate'er is done below:
Of knowledge doth the Seer a brighter ray,
Than illumines me, display?
Some deeper drink of wisdom's spring;
But proofs, that flash conviction I demand.
The Sphinx display'd her dreadful wing,
His wisdom saved the sinking land;
Then let my grateful soul disdain
To rank the hero with the murderer's train.

CREON, CHORUS.

CR. Ye citizens of Thebes, th' atrocious crime,
Charged on me by the royal Œdipus,
Hath reach'd my ear: my soul disdains the charge.
If in the present ills he deems that aught
Of injury to him by word or deed
By me hath been attempted, let me breathe
This vital air no longer, such ill fame
Sustaining: for no trivial damage brings
This accusation, but of import high
To me, if I shall be reputed base
By thee, and by my friends, and by the state.
CHOR. From violence of passion this reproach
Haply burst forth, more than from sober thought.
CR. Whence his persuasion that the Seer, with me
In compact, to these falsehoods train'd his tongue?
CHOR. Such things were said, I know not with what thought.
CR. Roll'd his eye wild, disorder'd seem'd his sense,
Against me when this hated charge was urged?
CHOR. I know not; for it is not mine to see
What princes do. But this way comes the king.

ŒDIPUS, CREON, CHORUS.

ŒDIP. Darest thou come hither? In thy insolence
Art thou so harden'd, as again to tread
My courts, detected in thy base design
To murder me, and from my brows to rend
The regal crown? Now tell me, by the gods,
Hast thou mark'd in me aught of cowardice
Or folly, that encouraged thee to form
Such daring thoughts? Or deem'st thou that the deed,
Creeping with dark insidious step, mine eye
Would not observe; or if observed, my hand
Would not chastise? How frentic thy attempt,
Nor friends nor forces thine, at sovereign pow'r,
By multitudes and treasures gain'd, to aim?

CR. Know'st thou what thou wou'dst do? To my reply
Give an impartial hearing: learn, then judge.

ŒDIP. Potent art thou in speech, but I unapt
To learn from thee, my dark and deadly foe.

CR. To this now hear me what I first reply.

ŒDIP. But this reply not, that thou art not base.

CR. If thou canst think a self-will'd petulance,
Devoid of reason, good, thou art not wise.

ŒDIP. If thou canst think no vengeance will pursue
Injustice to a friend, thou art not wise.

CR. This, I allow, is just; but why alleged?
Show me what wrong thou hast received from me.

ŒDIP. Was it not thy suggestion, thy advice,
That I should send to this all-honour'd Seer?

CR. It was: my judgment yet remains unchanged.

ŒDIP. What time hath pass'd since Laius by the hands
Of ruffians fell?

CR. We may trace back a length
Of distant time.

ŒDIP. And was this prophet then

Famed for his skill?

CR. For wisdom as renown'd
As now, and highly honour'd.

ŒDIP. At that time
Made he of me no mention?

CR. None: not once
When I was present.

ŒDIP. Made you then no search
To trace this bloody deed?

CR. We did: but vain
Our anxious care.

ŒDIP. Why did not then this Seer
Declare these things?

CR. I know not; and on points
Unknown I would be silent.

ŒDIP. But one point,
Thy own concern, is not to thee unknown;
And this thou canst disclose.

CR. What is it? Speak;
For nothing known to me will I deny.

ŒDIP. Were he not basely leagued with thee, he ne'er
Had said that Laius by my hand was slain.

CR. If he saith this, thou know'st. I claim the right
To question thee, as thou hast question'd me.

ŒDIP. Ask what thou wilt; I never shall be found
A blood-stain'd murderer.

CR. Is my sister thine,
By nuptial ties united?

ŒDIP. Thou hast ask'd
What will not be denied.

CR. Dost thou not share
With her the sovereign pow'r?

ŒDIP. All that is mine
I to her will devote.

CR. Is not my seat
The highest, next your throne?
ŒDIP. And for that cause
Dost thou appear a base and faithless friend.
CR. Not so; wou'dst thou, like me, with temperate thought
Ponder things well. For first reflect, what man
Would choose to be a king, with all the fears
On royalty awaiting, might he sleep
Secure of fear, yet kingly pow'r possess?
It is not in my nature, nor in his
Who knows what wisdom is, to form a wish
To be a monarch, rather than to use
A monarch's potency. All things from thee
I now obtain, nor feel the pangs of fear.
Were I a king, I should do many things
Against my will: can then the regal state
Be sweeter to me than my princely rank,
And pow'r that knows not care? Nor is my mind
By falsehood so beguiled, that it aspires
To honours which no real good procure.
Now all things give me pleasure; all men now
Greet me with courtesy; now all, who want
Favours from thee, address me, for their suits
Through me they all obtain. And shall I quit
These solid pleasures for the empty pomp
Of royalty? A mind to wisdom train'd
Can not be so depraved: I never loved
To form such measures, nor in such would deign
To share with others. Dost thou want a proof?
Go to the Pythian shrine, and there inquire
If faithfully the answer of the god
I have reported: if thou find me leagued
In counsels with the Seer, put me to death,
And in the sentence shall my voice assent

With thine: but on suspicion void of proof
Condemn me not: the just not lightly deem
The base man honest, or the honest base.
For he, that throws a faithful friend away,
Doth himself equal wrong as if he threw
His life away, which is most dear to him.
This thou wilt know in time; for time alone
Shows a just man; the base a day unveils.

CHOR. His words are wise: beware, O king, nor err
Through passion: quick resolves are oft unsafe.

ŒDIP. When quick the lurking traitor 'gainst my life
Advances, me behoves a quick defence:
If I am still, and linger, his designs
Will be achiev'd, and my slow measures fail.

CR. What wou'dst thou then? My exile from this land?

ŒDIP. No: not thy exile would I, but thy death.

CR. When thou hast shown me guilty of some crime.

ŒDIP. Thou speak'st as one refusing to obey.

CR. Because I see thee not by wisdom ruled.

ŒDIP. For mine own welfare wisely I provide.

CR. Mine claims an equal care.

ŒDIP. But thou art base.

CR. What, though no crime thou know'st?

ŒDIP. I will be king.

CR. Thou shou'dst not be a tyrant.

ŒDIP. Thebes, O Thebes!

CR. Thebes is not thine alone: some share is mine.

CHOR. Princes forbear: in happy hour, behold,
Jocasta comes; her prudence may prevail,
And in this fiery contest mediate peace.

JOCASTA, ŒDIPUS, CREON, CHORUS.

JOC. Why, indiscreetly why this strife of words,
Unhappy princes, have you raised, nor blush,

Your country with afflictions thus oppress'd,
To stir up private contest? Wilt not thou
Enter these gates? Thou, Creon, hence depart,
Nor add a causeless grief to weighty woes?

CR. Alas, my sister, with injurious rage
A dreadful sentence Œdipus decrees,
Exile or death, against me to enforce.

ŒDIP. I own it: for I found him with base arts
Against my person plotting base designs.

CR. If I have done this, of this heinous charge
If I am guilty, let me not enjoy
The light of heav'n, but fall a wretch accurs'd.

JOC. Believe him, I conjure thee by the gods,
In this believe him, Œdipus; regard
His sacred oath, and me, and these thy friends.

CHOR. I too entreat thee, be persuaded, king:
With wisdom yield.

ŒDIP. What wou'dst thou I should yield?

CHOR. To reverence him, not weakly justified
Before, but by his oath more strongly now.

ŒDIP. Know'st thou what thou wou'dst ask?

CHOR. Full well.

ŒDIP. Then speak.

CHOR. On dark suspicion charge not, nor disgrace
With blame a friend, who thus attests the gods.

ŒDIP. Now be assured that, seeking this, thou seek'st
My ruin, or my exile from this land.

CHOR. No: by the brightest of the pow'rs of heav'n,
The Sun, of every god, of every friend
Abandon'd may I perish, sunk in deep
Perdition, if I e'er had such a thought.
My country's ruin rends my bleeding heart:
And greater were my grief, to former ills
If ills were added from your contest sprung.

ŒDIP. Then let him go, e'en though I needs must die,
Or from this country with disgrace be driven.
Thy mournful plea, not his, my pity moves;
Him shall my hate, where'er he goes, pursue.
CR. Harsh art thou e'en in yielding; when thy rage
Works its fell purpose, dreadful: souls like thine
Justly bring keenest tortures on themselves.
ŒDIP. Then leave me to myself: begone.
CR. I go,
To thee perchance not known; but still by these,
Just to my innocence, in honour held.

ŒDIPUS, JOCASTA, CHORUS.

CHOR. Why, lady, this delay to lead him hence?
JOC. First what hath happen'd here I wish to know.
CHOR. Words of dark import gave suspicion birth:
Hence an injurious charge which gnaws the heart.
JOC. From each to each?
CHOR. E'en so.
JOC. And what the cause?
CHOR. Enough, for me enough, my country sunk
With such afflictions, where they cease to cease.
ŒDIP. I know thee wise and good; why then persist
Thus to depress me, and to damp my heart?
CHOR. Let me repeat what I before declared.
Know then, O king, I must be deem'd of sense
Bereft, and lost to wisdom, if in thought
I could abandon thee. Thou once didst raise
This my dear country when with ills depress'd;
If thou hast pow'r, to safety guide us now.
JOC. Now, by the gods, inform me whence this rage,
That with such fury flames, O king, arose.
ŒDIP. I will inform thee (for than these more high

I reverence thee) of Creon's base designs.

JOC. Speak, if accusing him thy proof be clear.

ŒDIP. He saith I murder'd Laius.

JOC. Said he this

On his own knowledge, or from others heard?

ŒDIP. The prophet prompt to mischief he suborn'd,
Whose rude licentious tongue knows no restraint.

JOC. Think of thyself, respecting this, no more.
Hear me, and be assured no mortal man
Knows by prophetic art events to come;
Of this I give thee a decisive proof.
To Laius once an oracle announced
(I will not say that from the god it came,
But from his ministers) that time should bring
On him this fate, to fall beneath a son
That should his birth from him and me derive.
Yet foreign ruffians him, as fame reports,
Murder'd where three ways meet. A son was born;
Not three days pass'd, the infant's feet he bound,
Piercing the nerves, and by another's hand
Upon a desert mountain cast him forth.
The consummation then, that he should slay
His father, or that Laius by his son
Should fall, a fate so dreadful to his thoughts,
Phœbus achieved not; yet th' oracular voice
Decreed these things: regard them not: the god,
What from his hallow'd shrine he gave command
To trace, to your inquiries will disclose.

ŒDIP. What wild amazement, lady, at thy words
Seizes my troubled thoughts, and shakes my soul.

L. 737. Œdipus here obliquely censures the Chorus as wanting in respect to Jocasta, by declining to answer her inquiry, l. 714.

JOC. What perturbation moves thee thus to speak?
ŒDIP. Methought I heard thee say that Laius fell,
Murder'd by ruffian force, where three ways meet.
JOC. Such was the rumour then: it still prevails.
ŒDIP. Where? In what land befel this dire event?
JOC. Phocis the realm is call'd; the separate roads
From Delphi and from Daulia there unite.
ŒDIP. What length of time, since this was done, hath pass'd?
JOC. Short time before the regal crown of Thebes
Shone on thy brows, these tidings reach'd the state.
ŒDIP. To me, O Jove, what fate hast thou decreed?
JOC. Why hath a thought like this possess'd thy soul?
ŒDIP. No questions now; but tell me what the form
Of Laius, what his stature, and his age.
JOC. Tall, and of manly port; his locks just tinged
With gray; his form not much unlike to thine.
ŒDIP. O wretched me! Unweeting on myself
What dreadful curses have I here denounced!
JOC. Why this? I tremble as I look on thee.
ŒDIP. Greatly I fear the prophet sees too well.
Yet one thing more: That will give clearer light.
JOC. I tremble; yet whate'er I know will speak.
ŒDIP. Went he with few; or, as became a king,
With many guards attendant on his state?
JOC. Without more train than five, an herald one
Of these; a single chariot bore the king.
ŒDIP. Ah wretched me! All now is clear indeed.
What man was he who this relation brought?
JOC. A menial servant, who alone escaped.
ŒDIP. Is he now here attending in the house?
JOC. No: for returning thence when thee he saw
Holding the sovereign power, and Laius dead,
Touching my hand me suppliant he implored
Some rural charge among the pastured herds
To give him, that within the walls of Thebes

He seldom might be seen : I sent him : this,
And greater grace he, though a slave, deserved.

ŒDIP. Let him with swiftest speed then be recall'd.

JOC. He shall. But why to see him this desire ?

ŒDIP. I for myself have fears : much hath been said,
Which prompts my eager wish to see this man.

JOC. He soon will come. But am not I, O king,
Worthy what thus distracts thy thoughts to know ?

ŒDIP. My expectation to such height is raised,
That I will tell thee : for in whom more dear
Can I, thus struggling with my fate, confide ?
My father was the royal Polybus
Of Corinth ; Merope, who boasts her birth
From Dorian Chiefs, my mother ; in that state
I was esteem'd the greatest, till there chanced
A circumstance, which might my wonder claim,
But nought of anxious care : amidst a feast
One fill'd with wine reviled me as not born
The son of Corinth's king ; ill brook'd I this,
And scarce that day restrain'd myself ; the next
My father and my mother I address'd,
Earnest to trace the truth ; the insult raised
Their high resentment, though from heat of wine
It sprung ; with their affection I was pleased ;
Yet still this stung my heart, so deeply there
It rankled. Anxious to the Pythian shrine,
My purpose not disclosed, I take my way ;
To this inquiry no reply was deign'd,
And me unhonour'd Phœbus sent away ;
But show'd, the fates foretelling, other ills
With woe, with horror pregnant : he declared
That with my mother I was doom'd to mix
Embraces, and to light produce a race
By men to be abhorr'd ; nay, doom'd to be
The murderer of my father. When these words

Reach'd my affrighted ear, from Corinth wide,
My course thenceforth directing by the stars,
I fled, where I might ne'er behold the shame,
The infamy of these dire oracles
Fulfill'd. My way pursuing, to the place
I came, where thou hast said this monarch fell.
Yes, I will tell thee all the truth: as near
This place, where three ways meet, I held my course,
An herald, and exalted on a car
One of such form as thy description mark'd,
Met me: with force the leader of the way,
And the old Chief himself against me rush'd,
And drove me back; the leader, who aside
Had turn'd me, in my rage I strike: the Chief,
Soon as he saw me passing near the car,
Smote me, against my head he aim'd the blow,
He smote me twice; but from this hand received
Unequal recompense; beneath my staff
At once he sunk, and from his chariot roll'd.
I slew them all. Now should these kindred deeds
Prove like relation 'twixt this stranger slain
And Laius, lives there such a wretch as I?
Lives there a man so hateful to the gods?
Nor citizen nor stranger may henceforth
Beneath their roof receive me, none with me
Hold converse, from their houses all constrain'd
To thrust me; yet none other, but myself,
Denounced these curses on me. I pollute
The bed of him, who perish'd by these hands,
These blood-stain'd hands? And am I not most vile?
Am I not all defiled? If I must fly,
And exiled never, never see those friends
That are most dear to me, and never tread
My country's soil again; if I must mount

My mother's bed, in fated nuptials join'd;
If I must kill my father Polybus,
From whom my life, my nurture I received;
Who would not judge, who would not say with truth
That some remorseless Demon wrought these woes?
But never, never, O ye holy pow'rs
Of the just gods, may I behold that day!
No: from the sight of mortals let me sink,
Ere see a stain like this pollute my life.

CHOR. These things, O king, our consternation raise:
Yet see this herdsman, hear him; meanwhile hope.

ŒDIP. With eager expectation I await
His presence; hope till his arrival lives.

JOC. What doth thy thought, when he appears, intend?

ŒDIP. I will inform thee: if his words be found
With thine according, I escape these woes.

JOC. What of high import heard'st thou in my words?

ŒDIP. From his report thou saidst that Laius fell
By ruffians slain: that number if he still
Assert, I slew him not; it can not be
That one be many; by a single arm
If he declares the monarch fell, on me
The dreadful deed with all its guilt will fall.

JOC. Of his relation be assured; his words
He cannot now retract; not I alone,
But all Thebes heard them: with his former tale
Be his tongue now at variance, yet, O king,
Not of the death of Laius will he speak
As by the God foretold, that he must fall
Slain by my son; him my unhappy child
Slew not, but perish'd, ere his death, himself.
What then the faith of oracles? Nor that
To thee denounced, nor this will I regard.

ŒDIP. Thy sentiments are just; yet send with speed

To bring this herdsman back ; omit not that.

JOC. This I will haste to do: but go we in.
Whate'er to thee is pleasing I would do.

CHORUS.

STRO. 1. Fair Fortune deign with me to dwell,
My soul if holy reverence awes,
By thinking, speaking, acting well,
To bow obedient to the Laws.
From heav'n they draw their lineage high,
And tread with stately step the sky:
Their father the Olympian king;
No mixture of man's mortal mould;
Nor shall Oblivion's sable wing
In shades their active virtues fold.
In them the god is great, nor fears
The withering waste of years.

ANTIS. 1. The tyrant Pride engenders. Pride
With wealth o'er-fill'd, with greatness vain,
Mounting with Outrage at her side,
The splendid summit if she gain,
Falls headlong from the dangerous brow,
Down dash'd to ruin's gulf below.
Not so our monarch: for of old,
His contest glorious to the state,
In her own blood the Fury roll'd:
So may the god now guide his fate!

L. 910. With equal sublimity and energy the excellent Hooker expresses himself on the same subject...."Of Law there can be no less acknowledged, than that her seat is the bosom of God, her voice the harmony of the world; all things in Heaven and Earth do her homage, the very least as feeling her care, and the greatest as not exempted from her power; both angels, and men, and creatures of what condition soever, though each in different sort and manner, yet all with uniform consent admiring her as the mother of their peace and joy."

Still be the god's protection mine,
Strong in his power divine !

STRO. 2. But should some wretch, contemptuous, bold,
Brave the just gods, his hands with slaughter stain,
The vengeful pow'rs of heav'n disdain,
Nor their pure seats in holy reverence hold,
Him may perdition sweep away,
And thus his wanton pride repay ;
Him too, whom wild Ambition prompts to seize,
Though Justice cries aloud, forbear.
Can all his vaunts, who dares attempts like these,
Guard his proud heart from guilty fear?
Such deeds if glory waits, in vain
I lead this choral train.

ANTIS. 2. No more at Delphi's central cell,
At Abæ, or Olympia's hallow'd shrine
Attendant pay I rites divine,
Till the god deigns this darkness to dispel.
O Jove, if thee we rightly call
The sovereign lord, the king of all,
Let not concealment this in shades enfold
From thee, and thy immortal reign !
The oracles, to Laius giv'n of old,
They spurn with insolent disdain,
No more to Phœbus honours pay ;
And things divine decay.

L. 943. Abæ was in the territory of Phocis, of old sacred to Apollo, who had an oracle there. The soldiers of Xerxes set fire to the temple, and burned it to the ground : the Romans afterwards, through reverence of the god, gave the Abæans the privilege of being governed by their own laws.... Pausan. Phocic.

Olympia first became illustrious on account of the Oracle of Olympian Ju piter....Strabo.

JOCASTA, CHORUS.

JOC. Ye rulers of the state, with zealous mind
I hasten to the temples of the gods,
Bearing these wreaths, this incense in my hands;
For Œdipus with every anxious thought
Is tortured in suspense, nor, as becomes
His wisdom, from the past right judgment forms
Of later oracles, but yields his mind
To him that speaks, of terrors if he speak.
But since exhorting him I nought avail,
To thee, Lycean Phœbus, (for thy shrine
Is nearest) suppliant to present these pray'rs
I go, that thou would'st grant us from these griefs
Holy deliverance; for we all must fear,
When him, who steers our bark, we see appall'd.

CORINTHIAN, JOCASTA, CHORUS.]

COR. May I by you, O strangers, be inform'd
Which is the royal seat of Œdipus?
Or where, instruct me, may I find the king?

CHOR. The regal mansion this; the king is there;
The mother of his children here behold.

COR. Oh be thou blest, and ever with the blest
Converse, since thou art his accomplish'd wife!

JOC. And be thou blest too, stranger; worthy thou
For these thy courteous words. But say what cause
Brought thee to Thebes: what hast thou to relate?

COR. Good tidings to thy house, and to thy lord.

JOC. Those happy tidings what? Whence art thou come?

COR. From Corinth. May what I shall speak to thee

L. 974. Παντελὴς and τέλεια, as here used, do not signify perfection simply, but perfection in the marriage-state, when the nuptial bed is blessed with children. Hence the Ἀνδρὸς τελείου δῶμα, and the Ζεῦ τέλειε of Æschylus. Agam. v. 981.

Give joy! Yet haply it may give thee grief.

JOC. What may this be, and whence its double force?

COR. The Isthmian states (so, lady, fame proclaims
Among them) will appoint thy lord their king.

JOC. Holds not the aged Polybus that pow'r?

COR. No more; for death hath laid him in the tomb.

JOC. What wou'dst thou say, that Polybus is dead?

COR. If I speak aught but truth, be death my meed.

JOC. Go, my attendant, hasten to thy lord,
And tell him this. Ye oracles divine,
Where are you? Œdipus long since, through fear,
Lest he should kill the king, from Corinth fled;
Now he is dead before this wretched fate,
Nor fell he by the hand of Œdipus.

ŒDIPUS, JOCASTA, CORINTHIAN, CHORUS.

ŒDIP. O my Jocasta, dearest to my soul,
Why hast thou sent my presence to require?

JOC. Hear thou this man; then ponder well what end
The gods' high-honour'd oracles have found.

ŒDIP. Who is this stranger? With what tidings fraught?

JOC. From Corinth is he come, to tell thee this,
That Polybus thy father is no more.

ŒDIP. Speak, stranger; I would be inform'd by thee.

COR. If this I plainly must at first declare,
Know thou that he hath trod the path to death.

ŒDIP. By treachery, or th' attack of some disease?

COR. Slight force will sink the limbs of age to rest.

L. 1003. This is in strict conformity to ancient manners. When a messenger was charged with any mournful tidings, he endeavoured to soften the relation by prefacing it with something of an happier nature: Primum, ut opinor, *εὐαγγέλια*, says Cicero to Atticus, Epist. iii. lib. 2. So this man would first have saluted Œdipus as King of Corinth, but is compelled against his will to speak first of the death of Polybus. Dr. Burton.

ŒDIP. Wasted by sickness then, it seems, he died.
COR. And weary progress through a length of years.
ŒDIP. Alas, alas! Why, lady, should we pay
To Delphi's fate-foretelling shrine regard,
Or to the flight of birds that clang aloft?
I by their auspices was doom'd to slay
My father: but beneath the earth he lies
In death; and I am here, the sword not touch'd:
Unless perchance through fond desire of me
He wasted, so from me he had his death.
But, bearing with him all those oracles
Of no account, he lies among the dead.
JOC. All this did I not tell thee long ago?
ŒDIP. Thou didst; but I was borne away by fears.
JOC. Now then let none of them disturb thy mind.
ŒDIP. Behoves me not to fear my mother's bed?
JOC. Why should man fear, since fortune governs all?
Sage forecast sees nought clearly: wisest then
Is he who lives at hazard, as he may.
Fear not thy mother's bed; it is a dream,
Such as hath haunted many: he, who slights
These things, walks easiest through the ways of life.
ŒDIP. In all these things thy words are wise and just,
But that my mother lives; and while she lives,
Though wise thy words, I must perforce have fears.
JOC. Clear proof thy father's tomb affords thine eyes.
ŒDIP. True; but she lives: my fears are therefore just.
COR. What woman this, who thus excites your fears?
ŒDIP. Merope, stranger, wife of Polybus.
COR. And what to her relating gives you fear?
ŒDIP. An oracle heav'n-sent, of import dread.
COR. To be divulg'd? Or may not strangers know?
ŒDIP. They may: and thus the Pythian god declared,
That I am doom'd to mount my mother's bed,

And with these hands to shed my father's blood.
Dreading these things from Corinth far I fled
Long since, by fortune bless'd indeed, but sweet
The pleasure to behold a parent's face.

COR. Urged by this fear from Corinth didst thou fly?

ŒDIP. And anxious not to shed my father's blood.

COR. Why, since benevolent to thee I came,
Should I not free thee from this anxious fear?

ŒDIP. Grateful requital, stranger, this would claim.

COR. For this I chiefly came, at thy return
That from thy hand some boon I might receive.

ŒDIP. It may not be: to those who gave me birth
I never will return.

COR. This clearly shows
Thou know'st not what thou dost.

ŒDIP. Now by the gods
Old man, explain these words.

COR. If thy return
For their sake be denied.

ŒDIP. My fears are strong,
Lest by th' event the oracle be found
Prophetic of the truth.

COR. Dost thou then fear
Pollution from thy parents?

ŒDIP. That, old man,
That always gives me fear.

COR. Then be assured
Thou hast no cause for fear.

ŒDIP. No cause, if they
My parents, I their son?

COR. Nought to thy blood
Was Polybus allied.

ŒDIP. What mean thy words?
Was he not then my father?

COR. E'en as much
As I, no more.
ŒDIP. Was he, who gave me birth,
Not more than thou my father?
COR. Nor to him
Owest thou thy birth; no, nor to me.
ŒDIP. Why then
Did he avow me as his son?
COR. A gift
He from my hands received thee.
ŒDIP. And such love
Bore to an infant from another's hands
Received!
COR. To this his former childless state
Induced him.
ŒDIP. Was I purchased with thy gold,
Or to thee born?
COR. Amidst the bosky dales
Beneath Cithæron found.
ŒDIP. To those retreats
What led thy devious steps?
COR. I kept the herds
That o'er the mountain range.
ŒDIP. An herdsman thou
For hire?
COR. And thy preserver at that time.
ŒDIP. What sufferings didst thou find me in that state
Of ills sustaining?
COR. These thy wounded feet
Would evidence.
ŒDIP. Ah, why recal this ill
Of days long pass'd!
COR. I loose thy feet pierced through,

And bound together.

ŒDIP. Barbarous were the wrongs
My infancy endured.

COR. And hence thy name
From these thy sufferings given thee.

ŒDI By the gods
Was this my father's, or my mother's deed?

COR. I know not: he knows best from whom my hands
Received thee.

ŒDIP. Was I then from other hands
By thee received, not found by chance?

COR. To me
Another herdsman gave thee.

ŒDIP. Who that man?
Canst thou inform me?

COR. Of the menial train
Of Laius

ŒDIP. What, of him who once o'er Thebes
Reign'd king?

COR. Of him; and herdsman to that king.

ŒDIP. Is he, that I may see him, yet alive?

COR. You, in this country who reside, best know.

ŒDIP. Is there among you, that are standing here,
One, who the herdsman, by him mention'd knows,
Seen in the fields or city? Make him known:
The time demands these things should be made clear.

CHOR. I think he means none other, but the man
Whom from the fields long since thou hast desired
To see: none better than Jocasta knows.

ŒDIP. Knowest thou, lady, him we wish'd to come
To be the man of whom this stranger speaks?

JOC. Who...speak of whom?...Regard him not, nor wish
On words at random utter'd e'en to think.

ŒDIP. What, shall such traces of my birth appear,
And I not follow them ! It may not be.
JOC. Oh, by the gods inquire not, if thy life
Be dear to thee ! Enough that I am wretched.
ŒDIP. Be cheer'd : for were I thrice a slave, and thrice
My mothers slaves, thence no disgrace were thine.
JOC. Yet let my prayers prevail ; this search forbear.
ŒDIP. No pray'rs shall move me : I will be inform'd.
JOC. I have strong cause : I warn thee for thy peace.
ŒDIP. My peace that cause, whate'er it be, destroys.
JOC. Never, oh never may'st thou know thy birth !
ŒDIP. Go some one, bring this herdsman to me, haste
And let her glory in her noble birth.
JOC. Alas, ill-fated man ! for by that name
Alone, ah me ! can I address thee now.
And by none other ever from this hour.
CHOR. Ah, wither is the queen with hasty step
Fled, pierced with anguish ? From this silence great
My fear, lest something dreadful should burst forth.
ŒDIP. Burst forth what may, my soul is bent to know,
Mean though it be, my race : but she perchance
(For, as a woman, lofty are her thoughts)
Looks with disdain on my ignoble birth.
I am the son of Fortune : while she smiles,
I shall not be disgraced : my mother she,
The Months, my kindsmen, have design'd me mean,
And great : thus born, no other can I be,
Nor will I ever blush to know my race.

L. 1109. Jocasta was now acquainted with the dreadful secret ; she could not prevail upon Œdipus to forbear further inquiry ; she could not be present at the discovery to him ; she could not sustain these horrors ; she hastens to put an end to her wretched life : her words, as she quits the scene, are concise and obscure, but alarming : they speak to the heart more powerfully than all the pomp of eloquence could have done.

CHORUS.

STRO. If a prophet's soul be mine
Aught illumed with skill divine,
By Olympus' sacred height,
Ere the morning's streaming light
Thou, Cithæron, shalt unfold
All this mystery round thee roll'd,
And with pride and triumph own
Œdipus thy foster'd son.
Then with joy would we advance,
Leading light the festive dance;
Teach thy woods with joy to ring,
And with transport hail our king.
Glorious with thy silver bow,
Phœbus, these our joys allow!

ANTIS. Who, of all the heav'nly pow'rs.
Gave thee birth in these close bow'rs?
Some bright Nymph of sylvan race
Did the frolic Pan embrace,
Wand'ring o'er the mountain's brow?
Or to Phœbus dost thou owe
Thy birth? For him the craggy height,
Him the pastured ales delight.
Or to him, the god who roves
Through Cyllene's cypress groves?
Or did Bacchus, wont to tread,
His loved haunt, the mountain's head,
Thee receive, confess'd his son,
From the Nymphs of Helicon?
Raptured with their tuneful strain
Sportive oft he joins their train.

ŒDIP. If I, who converse never with him held,
May from appearance, reverend sages, judge,
I see th' expected herdsman; for his years

Accord, denoting him of equal age
With this Corinthian: more than this, I know
They, who conduct him, to my menial train
Belong: with more assurance thou may'st speak,
As haply thou hast seen this groom before.

CHOR. I know him well; to Laius in his charge
As herdsman none more faithful was esteem'd.

ŒDIP. Stranger of Corinth, I would ask thee first,
Of this man didst thou speak?

COR. This is the man.

ŒDIPUS, CORINTHIAN, HERDSMAN, CHORUS.

ŒDIP. Hither, old man; look up; to what I ask;
Answer. To Laius didst thou once belong?

HERD. I was his slave, but not a purchased slave,
My birth was in his house.

ŒDIP. Thine office what?
What was thy life?

HERD. Pass'd chiefly on his herds
Attending.

ŒDIP. To what pastures didst thou drive
Thy charge?

HERD. Around Cithæron, and the tracts
Adjoining to the mountain.

ŒDIP. Dost thou know
This man? Didst thou e'er see him?

HERD. Of what deed,
What man is thy inquiry?

ŒDIP. Of this man
Now present: commerce with him hast thou held?

HERD. My memory fails; I cannot speak at once.

COR. No wonder, lord; but I will soon recal
Things to his memory lost; for well I know

He must remember in Cithæron's vales,
When of two herds the charge was his, and mine
Of one, I neighbour'd with him three whole months,
From spring till cold Arcturus with him brings
The winter; to their stalls I then drove back
My herds, and he to those of Laius his.
Have I said aught but truth and real fact?

HERD. These things are true, though facts of distant times.

COR. Say then, dost thou remember that a child
Thou gavest me there to nurture as mine own?

HERD. What wou'dst thou? Wherefore is that question ask'd?

COR. This, my good friend, is he who was that child.

HERD. Perdition seize thee; wilt thou hold thy peace?

ŒDIP. Ah, thou dost wrong: rebuke him, not old man;
For more than his thy words deserve rebuke.

HERD. In what, most worthy lord, do I offend?

ŒDIP. To what concerns this child, of which he asks,
Replying not.

HERD. He speaks he knows not what,
Mere idle talk.

ŒDIP. Thou wilt not with good grace
Speak freely; but the truth thou wilt declare
Writhing beneath the scourge.

HERD. Oh, by the gods,
Scourge not an old man!

ŒDIP. Seize him, bind his hands
This instant.

HERD. Wretched me! And for what cause?
What wou'dst thou know?

ŒDIP. This child, of which he asks,
Didst thou consign it to his hands!

HERD. I did.
Would I had died that day!

ŒDIP. And thou shalt die,

Unless thou speak the truth.

HERD. And if I speak,
I must be more undone.

ŒDIP. This man, it seems,
Is studious of delay.

HERD. Not so: I said
Long since I gave it to him.

ŒDIP. Whence received?
Thine own, or from some other?

HERD. Not mine own,
But from another's hand.

ŒDIP. From whom? from one
That dwells at Thebes?

HERD. Now by the gods, O king,
Inquire no more.

ŒDIP. If I must ask again,
Thou diest.

HERD. Beneath the roof of Laius born.

ŒDIP. Born to a slave? Or drew he from the king
His birth?

HERD. For me how terrible to speak!

ŒDIP. Ay, and for me to hear: yet I must hear.

HERD. The son of Laius he was call'd; of this
Thy queen, Jocasta, can inform thee best.

ŒDIP. Gave she the child to thee?

HERD. She did, O king.

ŒDIP. With what intent?

HERD. By me to be destroy'd.

ŒDIP. What, she who gave him birth! O wretch!

HERD. Through dread
Of oracles denouncing ill.

ŒDIP. What ill?

HERD. That he should kill his parents: this was said.

ŒDIP. Why then to this old man consign thy charge?

HERD. Through pity: for, my lord, I thought this man
Would bear him to a distant land, of which
He is a native; but he saved him, saved
To misery: for if thou art he, of whom
He speaks, know this, most wretched is thy fate.

ŒDIP. Is there a wretch like me? My dreadful fate
Is now unveil'd. O light, thy beams no more
Let me behold, for I derive my birth
From these, to whom my birth I should not owe;
My dearest commerce I have held with those,
Whose commerce nature starts at; I have slain
Those, from whose blood the foulest stain I draw.

CHORUS.

STRO. Ye race of mortals, what your state?
Life I an airy nothing deem.
For what, ah! what your happiest fate,
More than light fancy's high-wrought dream?
How soon those baseless dreams decay
And all the glittering visions melt away!
Whilst thy example, hapless king,
Thy life, thy fortune I bewail,
Happy no man of mortal birth I hail.
Thine was no vulgar fate: its tow'ring wing
To wealth, and empire's splendid summit soar'd:
When, silenced her mysterious lore,
The harpy-talon'd monster scream'd no more,
Our bulwark thou against that pest abhorr'd,
Thebes gave her sceptre to thy honour'd hand,
And hail'd thee monarch of a mighty land.

ANTIS. Who now is pierced with keener pain?
To all thy glories bid farewell:
They fly, and in their stead a train
Of miseries croud with thee to dwell.

To one great port, illustrious king,
Their gallant barks the son and father bring;
But sink in wild waves roaring round.
How could thy father's bed so long,
Ah, how in silence bear the horrid wrong!
But thee th' all-seeing eye of time hath found,
And these unhallow'd rites abhorrent shows.
O son of Laius, ne'er again,
Ne'er could my sorrowing heart thy sight sustain:
Yet I lament in mournful strains thy woes,
By thee 'twas mine to life, to light, to rise;
By thee in dark despair to close my eyes.

MESSENGER, CHORUS.

MESS. Ye ever-honour'd rulers of this land,
What deeds are you to hear, what to behold,
What grief to suffer, if you yet revere,
As Thebans ought, the house of Labdacus!
Not all the cleansing streams that Ister rolls,
Or Phasis, the pollutions of this house
Can wash away: as yet they lie conceal'd;
But soon the dreadful deeds will burst to light,
Deeds not of force, but choice: with keenest pangs
Ills self-inflicted rend the tortured heart.

CHOR. No weight was wanting to the ills we knew
Before: what bring'st thou now to grieve us more?

MESS. What soonest may be spoken, soonest heard,
Take briefly, the revered Jocasta's dead.

CHOR. Unhappy queen! And what the fatal cause?

MESS. That from herself arose: but of these deeds
The greatest grief is wanting, for no eye
Beheld them; yet, as far as memory prompts,
Her heart-corroding sufferings thou shalt know.
Soon as the portal she had pass'd, with woes
Distracted to her nuptial bed she rush'd

Rending her hair, and entering barr'd the doors:
On Laius long since dead she calls, and makes
Sad mention of the seed announced of old,
By which he died, and left her to produce
Unhallow'd offspring, at which nature starts.
Her nuptial bed with anguish she bewail'd,
Where from her husband husbands she brought forth,
And sons from sons. How, after this, she died
I know not, for with loud laments, and pace
Impetuous in rush'd Œdipus: her ills
Our thoughts no more engaged, for all our eyes
Were fix'd on him; he, hurrying on, demands
A sword; his wife he seeks, and not his wife,
His mother, and the mother of his sons.
Him raving thus some evil demon shows,
What not a man there present would declare,
Where he might find her; with a dreadful cry,
As by some impulse, 'gainst the folding doors
He rush'd, and all the solid bolts beat down,
Then burst into the chamber; there he saw
His wife, but breathless now, around her neck
The wreathed cord: at this unhappy sight
Deeply he groan'd, and loosed the strangling noose.
When on the floor the wretched corse was laid,
The golden clasps, with which she was adorn'd,
He from her vestments snatch'd, then, dreadful deed!
Raised high his hand, and plunged their piercing points
Deep in his orbs of sight, exclaiming thus,
That her no more they should behold, his woes,
His horrid deeds no more; but henceforth dark
Nor see whom it beseem'd him not to see,
Nor those, with whom he should have converse, know.
Thus oft exclaiming he his eyelids raised,
And rent the orbs of sight; the bleeding balls

Imbath'd his cheeks, nor ceased the gushing drops,
But rain'd a show'r of black and streaming gore.
This the unhappy fate of both, the woes
Of wife and husband blended dreadfully.
Their former happiness, with ample right
Of old call'd happiness, is now, this day,
Misfortune, lamentation, death, disgrace,
And all the names that misery ever knew.

CHOR. And hath he yet no respite from his ills?

MESS. He cries aloud, open the doors, and show
This murderer of his father, show to Thebes
This murderer of his mother; uttering words
Unholy, not by me to be expressed;
That he no longer will inhabit here,
But cast himself an exile from this land,
By his own curse devoted: yet a guide
He wants, and strength; for more than he can bear
Are his afflictions. But to thee he soon
Will show himself; the bolts, that close these doors,
Are opening; now shalt thou behold a sight,
At which with pity e'en a foe would melt.

ŒDIPUS, CHORUS.

CHOR. O misery, horrible to human sight,
Most horrible of all that e'er these eyes
Beheld! What madness, O unhappy man,
What demon seized thee, to thy wretched fate
Adding this extreme agony of woe?
Alas thy sufferings! But I cannot bear
To look on thee, (though much I wish to ask,
Of much to be inform'd, and much to see)
Such shuddering horror strikes me at thy sight.

ŒDIP. Woe, woe, woe, woe! O miserable me!
Wretch that I am, ah, whither am I borne?

Whose ears do now my cries of anguish reach?
To what are thy decrees, O fortune, changed
CHOR. To horrors, which nor eye nor ear can bear.
ŒDIP. Ah me, this cloud of darkness thick'ning round,
Hateful, beyond expression, beyond cure,
And beyond hope! Ah me, how keen the sting
Of frenzy, and the memory of my ills!
CHOR. No marvel if in sufferings great as thine
Redoubled ills bring on redoubled woes.
ŒDIP. Thou art a friend, yet stedfast, faithful yet;
Thy care, thy kind attention yet remains
E'en to the blind. I know thee, though mine eyes
Are dark, distinctly know thee, and thy voice.
CHOR. Dreadful thy deeds: how hast thou dared thine eyes
To mangle thus? What god enforced this rage?
ŒDIP. This was the work of Phœbus: O my friends,
Phœbus accomplish'd all my ills, my woes.
With his own hands no man e'er rent his eyes,
But I unhappy. Why should I have sight,
Since, had I eyes, nought pleasant could I see?
CHOR. Mournful these truths, and just are thy complaints.
ŒDIP. What now is left me to be seen, or loved,
Address'd, or heard with pleasure? O my friends,
Drive hence, my friends, quick from your country drive
This pestilent destroyer, most accursed,
Of mortal men, most hateful to the gods.
CHOR. Unhappy in thy ills, and in the sense
Of these thy ills, oh that I ne'er had known thee!
ŒDIP. Perish the man, who in the rural dale
Unbound my feet, and from destruction snatch'd
(To me no kindness) saved the helpless child:
For had I perish'd then, this had not been,
This misery to myself, and to my friends.
CHOR. Oh that to thee such fate had been assigned!

ŒDIP. Hither I had not come this guilty wretch,
The murderer of my father, nor been call'd
Husband to those who gave me birth. But now,
Sprung from unhallow'd parents, giving sons
To those whose son I am, what woes are mine!
And if 'midst ills there be an heavier ill,
With all its weight it falls on Œdipus.

CHOR. Thy counsels cannot claim my praise as wise;
For better not to be, than to live blind.

ŒDIP. If what is done I have not wisely done,
Instruct me now, and counsel me no more.
I know not with what eyes in Pluto's realm
I could behold my father, had I sight,
Or my unhappy mother: these dark orbs,
These deeds are better than the strangling cord.
But to behold my children's opening bloom,
As I beheld them bloom, must be a sight
Much to be wish'd: no, never to my eyes;
Nor e'en this city, nor its rampired tow'rs,
Nor the revered forms of its sculptured gods,
Of which I, once of all the sons of Thebes
Most glorious, have deprived myself, my voice
Injoining all an outcast hence to chase
This wretch unhallow'd, by the gods declared
Impure, and from the blood of Laius sprung.
This impious stain disclos'd, could e'er my eyes
Dare unaverted look on these again?
No: could I stop the fount of hearing too,
Without remorse from this unhappy frame
Would I shut out its entrance, that nor eye
Nor ear might aught perceive; for sweet the life
That glides away without the sense of ills.
Me, O Cithæron, why didst thou receive,
Or when received not instantly destroy,

That whence my birth I never might have shown?
O Polybus, O Corinth, and the house
Once call'd my father's, what a seemly form
Of glory, covering ills that rankled deep,
In me you cherish'd, for I now am found
Vile, and my birth deriving from the vile!
O ye three ways, ye secret dells, thou grove,
And, where the three ways meet, thou narrow path,
Who drank my father's blood shed by these hands,
Yet, do you yet remember me, what deeds
I did among you, then what deeds again
I here committed? O ye nuptials, O
Ye nuptials, you produced this plant, then gave
To the same soil the same seed back, and show'd
Fathers, sons, brothers, streams of kindred blood,
Sisters, wives, mothers, and whatever deeds
'Mongst men are deem'd most vile. But, since the deeds
Shameful in act not well beseem the tongue,
Quick, by the gods, in some far distant place
Hide me, or kill me, or beneath the sea
Hurl me to sink for ever. Come, my friends,
Disdain not an unhappy man to touch;
Let me prevail; why should you fear? my ills
Of all mankind none but myself can bear.

CHOR. But Creon comes, at thy request to grant,
By counsel or by deed, whate'er is right:
He now is left sole sovereign of this land.

ŒDIP. To him how can I speak? from him what grace
With justice can I hope? for he before
Found me injurious, and in all things vile.

CREON, ŒDIPUS, CHORUS.

CR. I come not to insult thee, Œdipus,
Nor to reproach thee for thy former wrongs.

But you, respecting mortals if you feel
No touch of shame, revere th' all-feeding flame
Of yon imperial sun; nor thus expose
Unveil'd such dire pollution, which nor earth,
Nor sacred water, nor heav'n's light receives.
But quickly bear him hence, beneath this roof
Conceal'd; for piety demands that those
By blood allied alone should see, should hear
The ills of those from the same blood derived.

ŒDIP. Now by the gods, since all my fears from thee
Thou hast rent from me, and benevolent
Comest to a wretch thus vile, grant me one grace:
What I shall ask concerns thy good, not mine.

CR. Of me thus warmly what wou'dst thou request?

ŒDIP. With all speed cast me from this land where ne'er
With mortal man I may hold converse more.

CR. That I would grant, be thou assured; but first
Behoves me what the god requires to know.

ŒDIP. Long since have all his dictates been declared,
This parricide, this monster to destroy.

CR. These things have been declared; but better now
In this our state to learn what must be done.

ŒDIP. For such a wretch wilt thou consult the god?

CR. Thy fate hath taught us to revere his truth.

ŒDIP. I charge thee, I conjure thee, in a tomb,
Such as thou wilt, place her who in the house
Lies dead: so near allied, this office well
Becomes thy care. But never may this town,
Seat of my fathers, deign to let me live
Within its walls: but suffer me to dwell
On those wild mountains, my Cithæron call'd:
My father and my mother, when alive,
My tomb appointed there; there let me die,
Where they design'd my death; for well I know

That nor disease, nor aught besides to man
Most hurtful, could destroy me; nor from death
Had I been saved, but for some dreadful ill:
Let my ill fate then go, where it will go.
But I have children, Creon; on my sons
Thy anxious care employ not; they are men,
And never shall their lives, where'er they are,
Feel the distress of pinching penury.
But for my poor lamented daughters, left
In virgin helplessness, from whom apart
My table ne'er was spread, o'er whom has stream'd
The sweet effusion of a father's love,
Of them take tender care; and this warm wish
Indulge me, let me touch them with my hands,
And o'er them wail their ills: go then, O king,
Generous and noble by thy lineage, go:
If with my hands I touch them, I shall think
I hold them now, as when I look'd on them
With eyes of fondness....Ah, am I deceived?
Or near me my loved children do I hear,
Hear I their grief? Now, Creon, by the gods,
Didst thou in pity to the father send
These dearest pledges to me? Speak I truth?

CR. Thou dost: thy former fondness well I knew,
And my attention gave thee this delight.

ŒDIP. Oh, be thou bless'd; and for this courtesy
A kinder guardian may'st thou find the god
Than I have found him!...O my children, where,
Where are you? Come to me, come to these hands,
A brother's hands, which thus your father's eyes,
Once lamps of light, have quench'd. Your father I
(Alas, my children! erring, nor by sight
Nor thought inform'd) by her that gave me birth.
Yet I weep o'er you, for these eyes no more

Can see you, thinking on the cruel griefs
Which must embitter all your life, I weep.
To the bright circles of assembled dames
How will you go? Or how on festive days
To the throng'd theatre, returning home
More than each spectacle of tragic woe
Lamented there? But when your blooming age
Leads on the nuptial hour, who is the man,
My children, that will lead you to his house,
Regardless of the infamy which marks
My parents, and devolves the stain on you?
Interminable ills? Your father kill'd
His father, mounted then his mother's bed
And gave you, whence he drew his own, your birth.
With infamy you thus will be reproach'd:
What youth will wed you then? Alas, not one:
Neglected, O my children, must you waste
In cheerless solitude your lives away....
Son of Menœceus, since alone to these
A father thou art left (for we, who were
Their parents, are no more) neglect them not,
They are allied to thee, let them not roam
Unhusbanded, unfriended, and to want
Exposed, nor let their miseries equal mine:
Have pity on them, for their helpless age
Thou seest, by all abandon'd, save what rests
On thee: assent then, O thou generous man,
And pledge thy hand....To you once more I turn,
My children: to instruction were your age
Mature, much admonition on your minds
Would I enforce: but now I can no more
Than pour this pray'r, where'er your lot to live
That happier than your father's be your lives.

CR. Enough of tears: but enter now the house.

ŒDIP. I must, howe'er unwillingly, obey.
CR. All things in season have their proper grace.
ŒDIP. Know'st thou my warm wish now?
CR. That wish declare.
ŒDIP. Me from this land an out-cast that thou drive.
CR. Thou ask'st what is the god's, not mine to grant.
ŒDIP. I am a wretch detested by the gods.
CR. Then soon perchance thy wish thou may'st obtain.
ŒDIP. Speak'st thou the truth?
CR. It is not mine to speak
With falsehood what is foreign to my thought.
ŒDIP. Now lead me hence.
CR. Thy children must be left.
ŒDIP. Take them not all, Oh take not all away.
CR. Be not desirous all things to obtain.
Weigh what is pass'd: for what thou hast obtain'd,
False to thy hopes, attends thee not through life.
CHOR. Inhabitants of Thebes, my native state,
Behold your Œdipus, whose piercing mind
Solved the destructive monster's mystic charm,
Once your most potent, most illustrious chief,
To fortune and the people's favouring voice
Superior, by transcendent merit raised
To his high state; behold him now how fallen,
How sunk beneath a flood of dreadful woes?
See this, and, mortal as thou art, survey
Man's last deciding day, and none pronounce
Happy, the bounds of life till he hath pass'd
Safe, and uninjured by the storms of fate.

ŒDIPUS

AT COLONUS.

PERSONS OF THE DRAMA.

ŒDIPUS

CREON

THESEUS

POLYNICES

ANTIGONE

ISMENE

A COLONIATE

CHORUS, Magistrates of COLONUS.

ŒDIPUS AT COLONUS.

THE illustrious but unhappy Œdipus is here represented as old and blind, driven from his realms, reduced to extreme indigence, and wandering into a foreign country where he is destined to die. The unshaken fortitude of his soul, and the sedate dignity which he sustains under his afflictions, command our reverence; and we feel as deep, perhaps a deeper concern for the Exile at Colonus, than we felt for the Monarch at Thebes. Antigone, with a cheerful and unremitting assiduity, attends her father through all his wanderings, guides his steps, begs for him his daily food, and mitigates his sorrows; she is the most perfect example of tender affection and filial piety. Her sister Ismene bears not so considerable a part in this drama, but she appears in the same amiable light. An Athenian audience must be highly pleased with a representation of their Hero Theseus, whose open and generous character is finely contrasted with that of the insidious and unfeeling Creon. Though a soft melancholy is diffused through most of the scenes of this drama, and Pity is the passion to which they in general apply, yet there are some of a stronger

and a rougher nature; Œdipus is not to die like vulgar mortals; the fate of kingdoms depends upon his death, and it is attended with circumstances of sublime conception which awe and terrify.

The Scene is beautifully described by Antigone at the opening of the drama, and again by the Chorus in their first ode.

ŒDIPUS

AT COLONUS.

1...19

ŒDIPUS, ANTIGONE.

ŒDIP. Tell me, thou daughter of a blind old man,
Antigone, to what land are we come,
Or to what city? Who th' inhabitants?
Who with a slender pittance will relieve,
E'en for the day, the wandering Œdipus?
I ask indeed but little, and receive
Less than that little; yet for me e'en that
Suffices; my afflictions, the long course
Of years so pass'd, and fortitude of soul
Teach me with cheerfulness to bear my ills.
But, O my daughter, some one if thou seest
Or in the sacred groves, or on the seats
Not hallow'd, lead me thither, place me there,
That in what land we are we may inquire;
For of the natives, strangers as we are,
We come to learn, and as instructed act.

ANT. My father, woe-enduring Œdipus,
Tow'rs, the strong bulwarks of some city, rise
In distant view. This place, if right I judge,

Is sacred, flourishing with laurels, vines,
And olives close enwoven; in the midst
Thick-fluttering nightingales their sweet notes tune.
Rest therefore seated on this unhewn stone,
For tiresome to thine age the length of way.

ŒDIP. Then seat me there, and guide a blind old man.

ANT. That tender office length of time hath made
Familiar to me.

ŒDIP. What the place, where now
We rest our steps? Canst thou inform me?

ANT. Well
I know we tread Athenian ground; the place
I know not.

ŒDIP. From each passing traveller
Of that we are inform'd.

ANT. Wilt thou I go,
And what the place inquire?

ŒDIP. Such is my wish,
If near us it hath habitants, my child.

ANT. It is inhabited: but that I go
Needs not; for near us I behold a man.

ŒDIP. Doth he advance, and hither speed his steps?

ANT. He is e'en present; what th' occasion then
Prompts thee to say, speak, for the man is here.

ŒDIPUS, ANTIGONE, A COLONIATE.

ŒDIP. Stranger, I hear from her who sees for me
And for herself, that thou in happy hour
Art come to teach us what we wish to know.

COL. Ere thou speak more, come from that seat; the place,
That holds thee now, is hallow'd from thy tread.

ŒDIP. What is the place then, sacred to what god?

COL. Nor touch, nor habitation dares profane
That place; for there the dreadful goddesses,

Daughters of Earth and Night, have their abode.

ŒDIP. Them by what awful name should I invoke?

COL. This people call them the Eumenides,
The all-beholding pow'rs: in other realms
By other honour'd names they are rever'd.

ŒDIP. Their supplicant propitious may these pow'rs
Receive; that never from their seat here fix'd
I may henceforth depart!

COL. What may this mean?

ŒDIP. It is the sign which ratifies my fate.

COL. Nay, hence I dare not move thee, till I show
The mandate of the city how to act.

ŒDIP. Now by the gods disdain not to inform
E'en such a wanderer what I wish to ask.

COL. Speak; thou shalt find that I disdain thee not.

ŒDIP. What is this place, which now our feet hath reach'd?

COL. Whate'er I know, attend, and thou shalt hear.
Sacred is all this place, for Neptune here
Is lord revered; and he, who bears the fire,
Prometheus the Titanian: but the ground
Beneath thy feet is call'd the brazen way,
Which forms the firm base of th' Athenian tow'rs.
The fields adjoining glory in their Chief,
Colonus the Equestrian; and from him
All bear their common name. I tell thee things,
O stranger, not by fame alone renown'd,

L. 65. When Ouranus was dethroned and mutilated by Saturn, he called his other sons together, and charged them to avenge his wrongs. The combined brothers, among whom was Iapetus, became very formidable to Saturn, and afterwards to Jupiter; these, and the whole party, were named Titanes, from Titan, the eldest son of Ouranus, who acted as their chief. From Iapetus this appellation descended to his son Prometheus; who is here with peculiar propriety styled πυρφόρος θεὸς, because, as we are told by Pausanias, the youths, who contended in the race called ἀγὼν λαμπαδοδρομίας, lighted their torches at his altar here mentioned, and ran towards the city.

But by consent of ages honour'd more.

ŒDIP. Are there these places who inhabit?

COL. Here
Are many habitants, and from this god
They take their name.

ŒDIP. O'er these who bears command?
Or in the people is the pow'r?

COL. This place
Is govern'd by the king, whose royal seat
Is in the city.

ŒDIP. What his name, who holds
The sovereign pow'r?

COL. The noble Theseus, son
Of Ægeus late our king.

ŒDIP. Would one of you
A message to him bear?

COL. With what report,
Or what instructions charged?

ŒDIP. That for his aid,
A little aid, he much may gain.

COL. What gain
From one of sight bereav'd?

ŒDIP. What I shall speak
Shall all be found to have the pow'r of sight.

COL. Stranger, I would not thou shou'dst err: but since
Noble is thy appearance, save the wrongs
Of fortune, where I saw thee first, remain,
Till I seek those who have their dwelling here,
Not in the city, and relate these things.
For they will judge if here thou may'st remain,
Or from this place behoves thee to depart.

ŒDIPUS, ANTIGONE.

ŒDIP. My daughter, hath the stranger left this place?

ANT. He hath; and unmolested thou may'st speak
Whate'er thou wilt, for I am here alone.
ŒDIP. Ye awful goddesses, of aspect stern,
Since in this country on your seats I first
Rested my limbs, to Phœbus and to me
Be not ungentle; for when all those ills
To me his voice oracular declared,
This rest he in the length of time announced,
When to the destin'd country I should come,
And place me in the hospitable seat
Of these tremendous pow'rs, there to lay down
My weary life; success and fame to those,
Whose grace receiv'd me, doom'd to bring; to those,
Who cast me out, discomfiture and shame.
Signs, these events confirming, he foretold,
The rocking of the earth, the thunder's roar,
Or Jove's red lightening; therefore well I know
None other but your faithful auspice led
My footsteps to this grove: I had not else
First as I journey'd, chanc'd to light on you
From wine abhorrent, pure myself from wine,
And place me in your awful unhewn seat.
Then, goddesses, since thus Apollo's voice
Hath destin'd, grant me now to end my life;
Unless too light you deem the woes I bear,
More than all mortals though to ills enslaved.
Come then, sweet daughters of primeval Night,
And thou, who from the mighty Pallas draw'st
Thy name, illustrious Athens, pity me,
Pity the shade of wretched Œdipus,
For what was once the man is now no more.
ANT. Forbear: some men, in years they seem, advance:
Their purpose haply to observe thy seat.
ŒDIP. I will be silent; and lead thou my steps

Aside into the grove; that I may learn
What their discourse; this caution prompts; for hence
How to direct our conduct we may know.

CHOR. Who may this be? Where is he? Look around:
Where now abides he? He hath left his seat,
Of mortals the most restless. See you him?
Look on each side; call to him; this old man
Hath rov'd with wandering steps, with wandering steps
Hath roved; a stranger surely; else he ne'er
Had enter'd, where no foot may tread, the grove
Of these infuriate virgins, whom we dread
To name, and awe-struct pass without a look,
Without addressing them, without a word,
Save what of happy omen from our mouths
Caution permits. Now we are told that one
Revering nothing hath approach'd this place.
Through all the grove I cast my searching eye,
But cannot see where now he makes abode.

ŒDIPUS, ANTIGONE, CHORUS.

ŒDIP. I am that man; for what you said I heard.

CHOR. Horrid his aspect, horrid is his voice.

ŒDIP. Nay, I beseech you, deem me not a wretch
Profane, that bids defiance to the laws.

CHOR. Jove the Protector, who is this old man!

ŒDIP. One, whom his former fortune hath not led
To happiness, ye rulers of this land;
In proof, I had not by another's eyes
Else crawl'd along, nor had this heavy frame
By a weak virgin been conducted thus.

CHOR. Alas, those sightless eyes denote thy fate
Unhappy, and thy aspect gives me proof
That thou art old. Yet charge not on our heads,
For we are innocent, the curse that hangs

O'er thee; for thou hast pass'd the bounds prescribed;
These thou hast pass'd: but set not thy rash foot
On the fresh verdure of that awful grove,
Where the full goblet with the fluent stream
Tempers the honied draught: forbear, restrain
Thy steps, ill-fated stranger; thence withdraw.
Wide is the space between us; dost thou hear,
Unhappy wanderer? Wou'dst thou hold discourse
With us, from that forbidden place remove;
Come to us; converse here is free to all,
Here freely speak; till then refrain thy tongue.

ŒDIP. Daughter, with prudence what may be resolved?

ANT. The judgment of the natives to regard,
And unreluctant, as behoves us, yield.
Take hold on me.

ŒDIP. I touch, I feel thee now.
O strangers, since I leave this hallow'd place
In you confiding, let me not have wrong.

CHOR. From wrong thou art secure: nor from that seat
Shalt thou, old man, against thy will be led.

ŒDIP. Further must I come forward?

CHOR. Further yet.

ŒDIP. Yet further?

CHOR. Onward, virgin, guide his feet,
Thou canst discern how far you must advance.

ANT. Follow me, O my father, with dark steps
Follow where I shall lead thee; and reflect
Thou art a stranger in a foreign land;
What to the natives then is odious, hate;
And what is dear to them, with reverence treat.

ŒDIP. Then lead me, daughter, where our foot may tread
Offending no religion, there to speak,
There hear; nor war we with Necessity.

CHOR. Stop there; nor o'er the rocky pavement set

Thy foot: there stay; enough hast thou advanced.

ŒDIP. But may I sit?

CHOR. On that stone's slooping top,
Gently inclining forward.

ANT. Mine the care
Softly to guide thee step by step. Now bend
Thy aged body on my careful hand.

ŒDIP. Ah, what severe affliction rends my heart!

CHOR. Unhappy man, since now thy foot hath rest,
Tell us who gave thee birth, and who thou art
Through many toils thus led; thy country what
I would inquire.

ŒDIP. O strangers, I have none,
Outcast I have no country. But no more.....

CHOR. Why dost thou speak these words, old man?

ŒDIP. No more
Ask who I am, nor further question urge.

CHOR. What may this be?

ŒDIP. A race to misery doom'd.

CHOR. Yet speak.

ŒDIP. Ah me, how can I speak, my child!

CHOR. Whence is thy lineage, who thy father, say.

ŒDIP. Alas, my daughter, what must I endure!

ANT. Yet speak, since now th' extreme of ills is thine.

ŒDIP. Then I will speak; t' evade it nought avails.

CHOR. How irksome your delay! Tell us with speed.

ŒDIP. Know you one sprung from Laius?

CHOR. What means this?

ŒDIP. Of the high race of Labdacus?

CHOR. O Jove!

ŒDIP. The wretched Œdipus?

CHOR. And art thou he?

ŒDIP. Nay, start not back through fear at what I say;
I am that wretch.

CHOR. O all ye holy gods!
ŒDIP. My child, what fortune will betide us now!
CHOR. Go hence, far hence, far from my country go.
ŒDIP. Where shall thy promise then its sanction find?
CHOR. To none is vengeance destined, who repay
Wrongs first received; and fraud opposed to fraud
Brings on the first deceiver punishment,
Not grace. So then, since thou hast left those seats,
Hence with thy utmost speed, and quit this land,
Nor further violate my country's peace.
ANT. Strangers revering virtue, since your minds
Are adverse to my father old and blind,
Hearing report of deeds to which his will
Consented not, yet me, unhappy me,
Ye generous strangers, pity; I implore
Your pity, for my father I implore,
Blushing as to your eyes my eyes I raise,
Yet as deriving from your source my blood,
Pray you to reverence his afflicted age:
How godlike this! On you our hopes depend.
Assent, refuse not to my pray'rs this grace,
I beg by all your souls hold dear, your wives,
Your children, by your duty, by the god,
View mortal man, none ever will you find,
If the god force him, that can shun his fate.
CHOR. Daughter of Œdipus, be thou assured
We pity thee, and with his sufferings moved
We pity him; yet, awed with holy dread,

L. 231. Οὐ καλοῖς ὄμμασιν, non pulchris oculis. Οὐκ ἀλαοῖς ὄμμασιν, Ald. et MS. non cæcis oculis; which reading Dr. Burton approves. The editor of Brumoy hath explained the passage justly, "à qui l'extrémité de "sa misére donne l'assurance de lever les yeux sur vous, contre la bienséance "de son sexe:" alluding to the modest manners of the Grecian virgins, who never appeared unveiled before men, except such as were nearly related: this is hinted at in the next line.

Other than what we said we dare not speak.

ŒDIP. What then doth glory or fair fame avail,
If thus without effect it glides away?
What, that men say th' Athenian state adores
The gods with highest sanctity, alone
Hath pow'r to aid the stranger sunk with ills,
Alone hath pow'r to save him? Where to me
Are all these boasts? You drew me from those seats,
Then drive me from your land, a name alone
And not my person dreading, or my deeds;
For I have suffer'd, but have done no wrongs.
My father and my mother, for whose sake
Thou look'st on me with horror, if I here
Must mention, doth it show my nature vile,
That I with force repell'd a rude assault?
I knew not, (had I known, e'en then no guilt
Had I incurr'd) I knew not to what height
Of ills my steps advanced: but they, who caused
My sufferings, knowingly my ruin wrought.
By the gods then, O strangers, I implore
Your faith; since thence you drew me, save, O save
Your supplicant; nor, honouring the gods,
Neglect the gods: not so: but be assured
The pious they behold, and they behold
The impious too; nor shall th' unhallow'd wretch
Ever escape: then dim not thou with these
The lustre of blest Athens, lending aid
To deeds unhallow'd. As thou hast received
Thy supplicant confiding in thy faith,
Protect me, save me; nor, this griesly form
Beholding, treat me with indignity;
Sacred and pious since I hither came.

I, 248. The humanity of the Athenians induced them to dedicate an Altar to Pity. Pausanias gives a pleasing account of the philanthropy and piety of this people. Attic. cap. xvii.

And much advantage to this people bring.
When your lord comes, whoe'er your sovereign be,
Full information shall be thine; meanwhile
Be not ungentle, do not work me ill.

CHOR. Thy pleaded reason with great force, old man,
Commands respect; nor briefly is it urged.
And it contents me well that on these things
The rulers of the land for me decide.

ŒDIP. Where, stranger, is the sovereign of these realms?

CHOR. In his paternal city: but the man,
Who saw thee first and sent me, hath in charge
To hasten with these tidings to the king.

ŒDIP. And think you he will hold a blind old man
Worthy his care, and hither deign to come?

CHOR. Instant, as soon as he shall hear thy name.

ŒDIP. Of this who shall inform him?

CHOR. Long the way

L. 280. This implies a censure. In the virtuous simplicity of those times eloquence and all attempts to move the passions were forbidden by the Athenian laws: the Chorus appeared here as Magistrates; they had even pronounced sentence, but Œdipus appealed to the king, in which they acquiesce. Nay in all cases that people as yet required a plain and concise narrative. Œdipus seems to have profited by the rebuke; for in his answer to the first address of Theseus he says

Thy generous spirit, Theseus, in a few words
Shines forth; behoves me then a brief reply.

L. 290. As Œdipus had not declared his name to the Coloniate whom the Chorus had dispatched to the king, he was afraid that Theseus, not knowing who he was, would pay no regard to a blind old man. To remove his apprehensions the Chorus assures him that his name was well known to them all; and as he had advanced far into the Athenian territories (such is the meaning of *μακρὰ κίλινθος*, for the distance between Colonus and Athens was inconsiderable) some travellers had probably seen him, and carried the report to the city. To account for the speedy appearance of Theseus, he says that he was on the road to Colonus, where he intended a sacrifice, when he heard that Œdipus was there.

Which thou hast pass'd; and travellers spread quick
Their free reports; by these inform'd he soon,
Be confident, will come; for much thy name
Hath 'mongst us all been sounded: it will add
Speed to his steps, and he will soon be here.

ŒDIP. And happy be his coming to his state,
Happy to me! Why should not a good man
Be to himself a friend?

ANT. Immortal Jove!
What should I say? Thoughts, whither do you lead?

ŒDIP. What may this be, Antigone, my child?

ANT. Advancing near a woman I behold
On a fleet courser of Sicilian breed;
A broad Thessalian bonnet shades her face
From the sun's scorching beams. What can I say?
May this be she? or is my sight deceived?
I doubt, then am assured, then doubt again:
I doubt no more: 'tis she, 'tis she herself:
Her eyes look cheerful on me, and her smile,
As she draws near, assures me it is she;
It is my dear Ismene, and none else.

ŒDIP. How hast thou said, my daughter?

ANT. That I see
Thy daughter, my dear sister: by her voice
Soon thou wilt learn that hither she is come.

ISMENE, ŒDIPUS, ANTIGONE, CHORUS.

ISM. My father, and my sister, with what joy
Do I once more address you! I with pain
Have found you, and with pain I look on you.

ŒDIP. Comest thou, my child!

ISM. To see a mournful sight.

ŒDIP. From the same blood descended...

ISM. Hapless birth!

ŒDIP. My daughter, art thou here?
ISM. Not without toil.
ŒDIP. My child, embrace me.
ISM. I embrace you both.
ŒDIP. Her too with me?
ISM. My self th' unhappy third.
ŒDIP. Why art thou here my child?
ISM. Through care of thee.
ŒDIP. Through fondness?
ISM. And with weighty tidings fraught,
Thus with a faithful servant I am come.
ŒDIP. Where are thy brothers, youths now strong for toil?
ISM. Where their fate leads: with them disorder reigns.
ŒDIP. How to Ægyptian manners have they form'd
Their nature and their life? For there the men
Sit in the house and weave the web; meanwhile
Abroad the active females always toil,
What life requires providing. Thus of you,
My children, those, who should these toils sustain,
Keep themselves close, like virgins, in the house.
You, in their stead, for my unhappy ills
Expose yourselves to hardships. She, e'er since
She pass'd her tender state of youth, and felt
Her strength grown firm, poor sufferer, on my steps
Attendant, leads my age; and wandering oft
Foodless and barefoot through the sylvan wilds,
Patient of frequent show'rs and the fierce beams
Of the hot sun, regards not the rich store
That fills the table in the sheltering house,
So that her father be supply'd with food.
And thou, my daughter, oft hast ventured forth,
The Thebans' watch eluding, to inform
Thy father of the various oracles
On him announced; and when they drove me thence,

An outcast from my country, thou daredst stand
My faithful guard. Now therefore what the cause
That thou art come? What tidings dost thou bear,
Ismene, to thy father? Not for nought
Comest thou from Thebes, of this I am assured,
Nor without bringing terror to my soul.

ISM. What late I suffer'd, while I sought the place
Of thy abode, my father, I forbear
To speak, unwilling to renew the sense
Of hardships by recounting them. But now
I come t' inform thee of the present ills
Sprung up betwixt thy two unhappy sons.
Their first debate was whether they should yield
The royal seat to Creon, nor pollute
The city, reasoning on the ancient stain
Which mark'd their race, and thy ill-fated house.
Now from some god, and their flagitious mind,
A contest rages, threatening greater ills,
To seize the sceptre and the regal pow'r.
The younger fiercely of the throne deprives
The elder, Polynices, and by force
Hath driv'n him from his country: he (for thus
Among us wide the swelling rumour flies)
An exile to the vales of Argos speeds;
There new alliance forms, and arms his friends
Confederate in his cause; that Argos soon
His cause avenging, would subdue the realms
Of Thebes, and raise his glory to the skies.
These are not tales, my father, idly spread;
No; they are dreadful facts. But when the gods
Will pity thy distress, I cannot learn.

ŒDIP. Hast thou an hope, my child, that yet the gods
Deign to regard me, and will save me yet?

ISM. I have from recent oracles this hope,

My father.

ŒDIP. What are they? What is by them
Announced, my child?

ISM. The time will come, when thee
Living and dead the Thebans shall require
For their protection.

ŒDIP. From a wretch like me
What succour can they hope?

ISM. It is declared
Their pow'r depends on thee.

ŒDIP. Am I a man
E'en when I am no more?

ISM. The gods, whose pow'r
Once sunk thee, raise thee now.

ŒDIP. How vain to raise
In his old age the wretch that fell when young!

ISM. Yet be assured that Creon for this cause
Will come to thee: expect him here with speed.

ŒDIP. What his intent explain to me, my child.

ISM. Thee near the Theban land, but not allow'd
To pass its borders, in their pow'r to hold.

ŒDIP. What succour from me, laid before their gates,
Expect they?

ISM. Fatal to them, if thy tomb
Be elsewhere raised.

ŒDIP. Whose wisdom could attain,
Without the god, this knowledge?

ISM. For this cause
Thee near their realms, but of thy self not lord,
It is their wish to place.

ŒDIP. In Theban dust
Will they entomb me?

ISM. That thy father's blood
Allows not.

ŒDIP. Me then never may they hold
Beneath their pow'r!
ISM. But to the sons of Thebes
This would be fatal.
ŒDIP. What the potent cause
Of such a fate?
ISM. Thy anger, at thy tomb
When they shall stand.
ŒDIP. By whom art thou inform'd
Of what thou say'st, my child?
ISM. By men who brought
Responses from the Delphic shrine.
ŒDIP. Of me
This did the god declare?
ISM. So they, to Thebes
Returning, made report.
ŒDIP. Which of my sons
Heard this?
ISM. Both heard it, and both knew it well.
ŒDIP. Could they hear this, vile wretches, and contemn
Their father, whilst they grasp at regal pow'r?
ISM. I grieve to hear, yet I must bear these things.
ŒDIP. The flames of this contention may the gods
Never extinguish; but to me be giv'n
The issue of this fated war, which now
They wage, with mutual fury lifting each
The hostile spear against the other's breast:
So should not he, the sceptre and the crown
Who now possesses, hold them long; nor he,
Who flying left his country, e'er return;
For they their father, with disgrace thrust forth,
Sustain'd not, nor protected; but by them
In this ill plight driv'n out I was proclaim'd
An exile. Thou wilt say, at my request

This, as a grace, the state then granted. No:
It was not so: for at the time when grief
Inflamed my soul to madness, when to die
Had been most welcome to me, and with stones
To have been crush'd, then not a man came forth
To gratify my wish: but when my grief
Was soften'd by the lenient hand of time,
And I discern'd that my now ebbing rage
Had punish'd more than my offence deserved,
Then, after this long interval, the state
Drove me by force an outcast from the land;
And these my sons, who then had pow'r to aid
Their father, will'd not to exert that pow'r;
But e'en a little word not deign'd, by them
Compell'd I wander thus, and beg my bread.
But from these virgins, far as nature gives
Their sex the pow'r to aid me, I receive
Food that sustains my life, upon the earth
Rest without fear, and all the dear supports
Children can yield a parent. But my sons,
Of filial piety regardless, grasp
At sceptres, thrones, and sovereign rule o'er Thebes.
But me they shall not win to league with them;
Nor shall th' imperial pow'r on them devolve
What may advantage them; this well I know,
Hearing the oracles she now relates,
And pondering the responses which the god
Of old announced to me. Let them then send
Creon to seek me here, or in their state
Who else is potent, me they shall not move.
If you, O strangers, with these awful pow'rs
Residing here, with your protection deign
To shield me, to your state you will procure
Much succour, and confusion to my foes.

CHOR. Worthy our pity, Œdipus, we deem
Thee and thy daughters: but conversing thus
Since thou hast urged the safety of our state,
Things, which import thy good I would advise.
ŒDIP. To act as thou shalt counsel I am prompt.
CHOR. Make an atonement to those pow'rs, to whom
Thou didst first come, and tread this hallow'd ground.
ŒDIP. Tell me, ye friendly strangers, with what rites.
CHOR. First from the ever-flowing fountain bring
Sacred libations touch'd with holy hands.
ŒDIP. And when these pure effusions I shall take.....
CHOR. Goblets, the work of skilful hands, are there;
Their highest verge and double handles crown.
ŒDIP. With verdant branches, or the woof's fine threads?
CHOR. Wreathing the soft wool of a lamb around.
ŒDIP. How next behoves me to disgrace these rites?
CHOR. Turn tow'rds the orient morn, and pour the streams.
ŒDIP. These from the goblets mention'd must I pour?
CHOR. At three libations; at the last, the whole.
ŒDIP. Instruct me yet; with what must this be fill'd?
CHOR. With water and with honey: add no wine.
ŒDIP. This when the earth's dark verdure hath received.....
CHOR. Thrice on it with both hands place olive boughs
Thrice three; then breathe thy supplicating pray'rs.
ŒDIP. These I would learn: of highest import these.
CHOR. Propitious as we call them, that with minds
Propitious they their votary would receive
And save, implore them thou, or be thy pray'r
Presented by some other: but take heed,
Low be thy voice, and few thy modest words;
Then slow retire with backward step. These rites.

L. 482. Wine was not permitted in the libations to the Furies: under this idea Œdipus before addressed them as "from wine abhorrent." L. 114. See Æschyl. Eumenid. v. 107.

If thou discharge, my hope will stand secure;
If not, O stranger, I must fear for thee.

ŒDIP. Hear you, my daughters, what with friendly voice
Those, who have here their habitance, advise?

ISM. We heard them: what must now be done, command.

ŒDIP. Me to discharge these things my want of strength,
And want of sight, two bitter ills, deny.
Go one of you, perform these rites; for one
In execution of such charge I deem
Sufficient as a thousand, if the mind
Be well affected; with the utmost speed
Perform it then; but leave me not alone;
For, if forsaken, these enfeebled limbs
Cannot creep onwards; they require a guide.

ISM. I go then: to discharge this trust be mine.
But show me first the place which I must find.

CHOR. On that side of the grove. Shou'dst thou of aught
Have need, O Virgin stranger, there resides
One thy inquiries ready to resolve.

ISM. For this I go; Antigone, do thou
Guard here our father: for a parent's sake
E'en if we toil, we think not of the toil.

ŒDIPUS, ANTIGONE, CHORUS.

CHOR. Though it be painful to awake a grief
Long calm'd to rest, yet, Stranger, I would ask.....

ŒDIP. What wou'dst thou ask?

CHOR. Whence all this signal grief,
This dreadful, this interminable woe?

ŒDIP. This, by each hospitable right I beg,
Forbear to open: they are deeds abhorr'd.

CHOR. Wide the report hath spread, nor yet hath ceased;
The truth I wish to know.

ŒDIP. Unhappy me!

CHOR. Let me prevail; comply with my request,
I beg thee; with thy wishes I comply.
ŒDIP. The worst of ills I have sustain'd, sustain'd
Unwillingly, O strangers: none of these,
Be the gods witness, sprung from my free choice.
CHOR. What may this be?
ŒDIP. In marriage foul, accursed,
Me the state bound, unconscious of the guilt.
CHOR. Didst thou, I tremble as I speak it, fill,
As fame reports, thy mother's bed?
ŒDIP. To hear
These things is death, O strangers; but from me
Sprung these two virgins, of my guilt two proofs.
CHOR. Immortal Jove!
ŒDIP. And from one mother sprung
With me.
CHOR. Are these then daughters, daughters these,
And sisters of their father?
ŒDIP. Wretched me!
CHOR. Wretched indeed: for infinite thy ills.
ŒDIP. Ah! never can their memory be effaced.
CHOR. And thou hast done.....
ŒDIP. These are no deeds of mine.
CHOR. How not thy deeds?
ŒDIP. I from the liberal state
Received a gift, (O that I never had!)
And thence sprung all the woes that rend my heart.
CHOR. Unhappy man! And art thou stain'd with blood?
ŒDIP. Why this? what wou'dst thou?
CHOR. With a father's blood?
ŒDIP. Oh! thou hast pierced me with another grief.
CHOR. Didst thou not slay...
ŒDIP. I did: yet I have what
To urge in my excuse.

CHOR. What canst thou plead?
ŒDIP. That I will tell thee: ignorant whose blood
My hand then shed, I by the law am pure;
For I was led unknowing to the deed.
CHOR. But see, excited by the fame of thee
Our king, the son of Ægeus, Theseus comes.

THESEUS, ŒDIPUS, ANTIGONE, CHORUS.

THES. Hearing reported oft in days long past
The bloody deed that quench'd thy orbs of sight,
I know thee, son of Laius: much more now,
By information on the way received,
I know thee well; those squalid weeds, that head
So mark'd with misery show me who thou art.
Unhappy Œdipus, I pity thee,
And wish to ask with what request to me
And to my people hither thou art come,
Thou, and that hapless virgin on thy steps
Attending: make it known: be it a task
Of toil or danger, fear not a repulse;
For I have learn'd, I have been train'd to feel,
Like thee, a stranger's woes; with many toils
And many dangers in a foreign land
Have I conflicted; from no stranger then,
As thou art now disdainful will I turn,
Not yieldiug thee protection; for I know,
Being a man, not more than thine my pow'r
To rule th' events to-morrow may bring forth.
ŒDIP. Thy generous spirit, Theseus, in few words
Shines forth; behoves me then a brief reply:
For who I am, and of what father born,
And from what country come, thou hast declared.
Nothing for me remains then, but to show
What at thy friendly hands I would request.

THES. Of this inform me then; I wish to know.
ŒDIP. I come this wretched body to bestow
On thee; a gift not to the sight indeed
Alluring, but th' advantages it brings
Are of more value than a beauteous form.
THES. And what advantage dost thou deign to bring?
ŒDIP. Time, not the present hour will show thee this.
THES. When shall in deed thy offer'd good appear?
ŒDIP. When I am dead, and thou shalt bury me.
THES. These are the last sad offices of life
Thou now hast ask'd; but all between hast left
Forgotten, or of no importance deem'd.
ŒDIP. In copious measure these are here on me
Conferr'd.
THES. Small grace dost thou of me require.
ŒDIP. Yet see; not small this contest.
THES. Of thy sons
Is this declared, or me?
ŒDIP. They would by force,
Compel me to return.
THES. If such their wish,
Thy voluntary wanderings on thy self
Bring much dishonour.
ŒDIP. But when such my wish,
They would not yield assent.
THES. Rash man, in ills
Anger brings no advantage.
ŒDIP. Hear me first,
Ere thou reprove me.
THES. Speak; for till inform'd
Ill it becomes me of the cause to judge.
ŒDIP. O Theseus, I have suffer'd dreadful ills
Added to ills.
THES. Is it thy scope to speak

Of the old ills which plunged thy house in woe?

ŒDIP. No: for of that each Grecian speaks aloud.

THES. More than man's common lot are then thy woes?

ŒDIP. They are: for from my country I am driv'n
By mine own sons, and never to return,
Since in my father's blood my hands are stain'd.

THES. Why then would they recal thee, since thy doom
Is to live distant?

ŒDIP. By the voice divine
Constrain'd.

THES. What terrors doth that voice denounce?

ŒDIP. Defeat and slaughter from this land.

THES. And whence
'Twixt them and me should strife and war arise?

ŒDIP. O friendly son of Ægeus, to the gods
Alone is giv'n exemption from old age
And death; all else th' all-powerful hand of time
Crumbles to dust. The vigour of the earth,
The vigour of the body wastes away;
Faith withers to the root, and Perfidy
Puts forth fresh branches. So in men, in states
Leagued now in friendship, the same spirit long
Never remains; but what is grateful now,
Instant to some, to some in distant time,
Becomes detested, then delights again.
So now though all is amity and peace
'Twixt thee and Thebes, yet ever-changing time
Will, in its progress, ever-changing nights
And days beget, in which your plighted hands,
Arm'd for a trivial cause, shall burst your leagues;
That my cold corse, at rest beneath the earth,
Shall drink their warm blood, if Jove reigns supreme,
And Phœbus, son of Jove, declares the truth.
But to unfold what silence ought to veil

Delights me not; permit me to proceed
In what I first began; keep but thy faith,
And never shalt thou say that Œdipus
Thou didst receive an useless habitant
(Unless the gods beguile me) to this land.

CHOR. These and like things this man before, O king,
Declared he for this country would achieve.

THES. The warm benevolence of such a man
Who would reject? To him among us first
The common hospitable altar stands;
Then coming suppliant to these awful pow'rs,
To me and to my country he repays
An ample recompense; revering which
His courtesy I never will reject,
But give him in this land to dwell secure.
If here the stranger wishes to abide,
I give thee charge to guard him: if thy will
Inclines thee, Œdipus, with me to go,
Thou hast thy choice; my will assents to thine.

ŒDIP. Thou ruler of the skies, on men like these
Pour down thy blessings!

THES. What dost thou resolve?
Wilt thou with me to Athens?

ŒDIP. Would the fates
Allow it: but my place is here.

THES. And here
What wilt thou do? I shall not check thy will.

ŒDIP. Here will I vanquish those, who drove me forth
An outcast.

THES. Great requital hast thou named
For thy reception here.

ŒDIP. If firm thy faith,
And to thy promise just.

THES. Confide in me;

I never will betray thee.

ŒDIP. With an oath
Thee, like one base of soul, I will not bind.

THES. My word is pledged: there is no surer tie.

ŒDIP. How wilt thou act—

THES. What chiefly dost thou fear?

ŒDIP. The men will come.

THES. These will sustain that care.

ŒDIP. Take heed lest if thou leave me...

THES. Teach not me
To act as best behoves me.

ŒDIP. One, who fears...

THES. My heart ne'er knew to fear.

ŒDIP. Know'st thou their threats?

THES. I know that no man to my will opposed
Shall force thee hence. I know that many threats,
Many vain words in rage are vaunted loud;
But when cool reason reassumes the sway,
These menaces sink forceless. So, though now
Perchance these threaten high, they soon shall find
Th' attempt to drag thee hence is but to dare
A wide rough sea, on which their bark will sink.
Nay, I exhort thee, e'en without my care
Be confident, if Phœbus be thy guide.
Though I may hence be distant, yet I know
My name shall guard thee from the assault of ill.

ŒDIPUS, ANTIGONE, CHORUS.

CHORUS.

STRO. 1. Well, stranger, to these rural seats
Thou comest, this region's blest retreats,
Where white Colonus lifts his head,
And glories in the bounding steed.

Where sadly sweet the frequent nightingale
Impassion'd pours her evening song,
And charms with varied notes each verdant vale,
The ivy's dark-green boughs among;
Or shelter'd 'midst the cluster'd vine,
Which high above, to form a bow'r
Safe from the sun or stormy show'r,
Loves its thick branches to entwine;
Where frolic Bacchus always roves,
And visits with his fostering Nymphs the groves.

ANTIS. 1. Bath'd in the dew of heav'n each morn
Fresh is the fair Narcissus born,
Of these great pow'rs the crown of old:
The Crocus glitters robed in gold.
Here restless fountains ever murmuring glide,
And as their crisped streamlets stray
To feed, Cephisus, thy unfailing tide,
Fresh verdure marks their winding way;
And as their pure streams roll along
O'er the rich bosom of the ground,
Quick spring the plants, the flow'rs around.
Here oft to raise the tuneful song
The virgin band of Muses deigns;
And car-borne Venus guides her golden reigns.

STRO. 2. What nor rich Asia's wide domain,
Nor all that sea-encircled land
From Doric Pelops named, contain,
Here, unrequired the cult'ring hand,
The hallow'd plant spontaneous grows,
Striking cold terror through our foes.
Here blooms, this favour'd region round,
The fertile Olive's hoary head;
The young, the old behold it spread,
Nor dare with impious hand to wound:

For Morian Jove with guardian care
Delights to see it flourish fair;
And Pallas, fav'ring, from the skies
Rolls the blue lustre of her eyes.

ANTIS. 2. My voice yet once more let me raise,
Yet other glories to relate:
A potent God for these we praise,
His presents to this favour'd state;
The Steed obedient to the rein,
And safe to plough the subject main.
Our highest vaunt is this, thy grace,
Saturnian Neptune, we behold
The ruling Curb emboss'd with gold
Control the Courser's managed pace.
Though loud, O king, thy billows roar,
Our strong hands grasp the well-form'd oar;
And, while the Nereids round it play,
Light cuts our bounding bark its way.

ANT. O happy land, for many glories famed.

L. 721. The sacred Olives in the Academia were called Moriæ; hence Jupiter, who had an altar there as protector of the place, had the name of Morian.

L. 729. That Neptune should teach his favoured Athenians the art of navigation is no wonder; but when the monarch of the Ocean is represented as giving them the Horse, and instructing them in equestrian exercises, does he not appear somewhat out of character? A passage in Strabo may account for this dark and mistaken mythology. He tells us that one Eudoxos a Cyzicene, being sent by Cleopatra, widow of Euergetes the second, on an expedition up the Nile, found above Æthiopia the broken prow of a vessel that had been wrecked, on which an Horse was sculptured: this he carried back to Egypt, where it was known to be a vessel of Gades, called from the sculptured image an Horse. Γαδειριτῶν γὰρ τοὺς μὲν ἐμπόρους μεγάλα στέλλειν πλοῖα· τοὺς δὲ πένητας μικρὰ, ἃ καλεῖν ἵππους, ἀπὸ τῶν ἐν ταῖς πρῴραις ἐπισήμων. Lib. ii. From these insignia probably came the Ποσειδῶν Ἵππιος of the fanciful Grecians.

Behoves thee now assert this splendid praise.

ŒDIP. Is there aught new, my daughter?

ANT. Creon nigh

Approaches, not without a numerous train.

ŒDIP. Revered old men, on you my safety now
Depends; protect me, shield me from his wrongs.

CHOR. Fear not; thou shalt have aid: though I am old,
The nation's strength is not decay'd through age.

CREON, ŒDIPUS, ANTIGONE, CHORUS.

CR. Illustrious habitants of this fair land,
I see, your eyes declare it, that surprise
Hath on my coming seized you, mix'd with fear.
But fear me not; nor let your speech be harsh.
No deed of outrage wish I to attempt,
For I am old, and know that to a state,
Potent as any Greece can boast, I come.
But I am sent on this man to prevail,
Thus worn with age, t' attend me to the realms
Of Thebes: this charge received I not from one,
But all the citizens; since most to me,
Through near affinity of blood, belongs
To mourn and pity his calamities
Then hear me, thou afflicted Œdipus,
Return with me; for all the sons of Thebes
Recal thee, with just cause, I more than all,
As more than others (else of all mankind
I were the vilest) for thy sufferings griev'd,
Beholding thee thus old oppress'd with woes,
Ever 'mongst strangers wandering, destitute
Of food, thy steps by one attendant led:
Her, hapless virgin, never had I thought
To see thus fall'n, sunk to this wretched state,
To thee for ever ministring, for thee

Begging the scanty meal, and at this age
Of nuptial rites bereft, and still exposed
To ruffian violence. With base reproach
Have I then wrong'd myself, and thee, and all
Our race? Am I that wretch? It is not so;
And things well known in vain would we conceal.
Be then advised: by the paternal gods
I now conjure thee, Œdipus, comply
At my persuasion, willingly return
To Thebes thy native city, and thy house,
Seat of thy fathers; to these regions bid
A friendly farewell, they deserve it of thee:
But justice to thy country, since thy youth
Was nurtured there, an higher reverence claims.

ŒDIP. O thou, audacious in whate'er is base,
And prompt from all just words to draw a train
Of deep insidious ills, why this attempt?
Why seek again t' ensnare me, where I most,
Should grieve to be ensnared? In days long past
When with domestic miseries o'erwhelm'd
My sickening soul in exile would have joy'd,
Then to my wish this grace didst thou deny.
But when my soul was glutted with its grief,
And in my house it had been sweet to rest,
For ebbing then I found my former rage,
Then didst thou drive me forth an outcast thence,
Nor was this near affinity of blood
Dear to thee. Now again, when thou didst see
This state benevolent to me, and all
Its race, dost thou assay to drag me hence,
Filing thy tongue to smooth thy harsh attempts.
Why this delight to show thy courtesy
When most it is unwelcome? If to thee,
What thy wants crave requesting to obtain,

One should give nothing, nor e'en show a will
To grant thee a supply; but, when thy soul
Enjoys its wish e'en to the full, would give,
When the slow favour all its grace hath lost,
Wou'dst thou this worthless pleasure wish to gain?
Such is to me thy offer'd grace, in words
Pretending good, but hateful in effect.
Nay, I will tell it these, that I may show
Thy baseness: hence to draw me thou art come,
Not with leave granted to possess my house,
But to be stabled on your confines; thus
Your country should be guarded from the ills
Fear'd from these realms. This never shall be thine;
But thine shall be those ills; for in that land
My vengeful spirit always shall reside.
Nor of my kingdom shall my sons share more,
Then to die in it. Seem I not to know
Better than thou the destined state of Thebes?
Much better, as by more unerring guides
Instructed, Phœbus and his father Jove.
Yet hither hast thou brought that treacherous front
Harden'd 'gainst shame: but that fine-filed tongue
Shall work thee woe, not safety; be assured
With me thou never shalt prevail: begone,
Let us live here; not ill we here should live
E'en as we are, could we delight in life.

CR. Mine dost thou ween a greater share of grief
From thy refusal, than what thou must feel?

ŒDIP. Greatly shall I rejoice if neither me,
Nor these here present thou hast pow'r to move.

CR. Thou wretch, whom time to wisdom could not train,
But mark'd thee a dishonour to old age!

ŒDIP. Pow'rful art thou in speech; but I ne'er knew
A man revering justice, who could smooth

His tongue to gloze all arguments alike.
CR. Much speech, and well adapted, differ wide.
ŒDIP. Though brief, yet well adapted are those words.
CR. No; not to one that hath a soul like thine.
ŒDIP. Begone, for I will speak for these; nor take
Thy station watching where behoves me dwell.
CR. These I attest, not thee, and these as friends,
What, should I seize thee, such replies deserve.
ŒDIP. Me from such guardians who by force shall take?
CR. From these apart thou shalt have cause of grief.
ŒDIP. From what rude deed doth such a menace rise?
CR. Of thy two daughters one I lately seized,
And sent away: this soon I hence will lead.
ŒDIP. Ah me!
CH. Thou soon shalt have more cause to sigh.
ŒDIP. Is then my daughter seized, and in thy pow'r?
CR. Pass a few moments this too I will seize.
ŒDIP. O friendly strangers, now on you I call,
What will you do? Will you desert my cause?
Will you not drive this ruffian from your land?
CHOR. Stranger, depart: neither thy present deeds,
Nor those late done, are just: with speed depart.
CREON, *to his attendants.*
Now is your time; seize her, and lead her hence,
If wayward she refuse to go, by force.
ANT. Unhappy me, ah, whither shall I fly?
Aid from what god, what man shall I receive?
CHOR. What dost thou, stranger?
CR. Him I shall not touch:
The virgin's mine.
ŒDIP. O rulers of this land!
CHOR. These things, O stranger, are not just.
CR. Most just.
CHOR. How are they just?

CR. I lead away mine own.
ANT. O state of Athens!
CHOR. Stranger, what means this?
What dost thou? Wilt thou not forbear? This soon
Must stand the test of arms.
CR. Take off thy hands.
CHOR. Not on this outrage while thy will is bent.
If thou wrong me, thou call'st the state to arms.
ŒDIP. Did I not say this contest would be great?
CR. This instant from the virgin take thy hands.
CHOR. Command not those o'er whom thou hast no pow'r.
CR. I say to thee, no more the virgin hold.
CHOR. I say to thee, hence take thy way, begone.
Come forth, my fellow-citizens, come forth,
Our state by force is plunder'd, hither haste.
ANT. O strangers, strangers, I am dragged away.
ŒDIP. My child, where art thou?
ANT. Borne by force away.
ŒDIP. Stretch out thy hands to me.
ANT. I have not pow'r.
CR. Will you not lead her hence? [*to his attendants.*
ŒDIP. O wretched me!
CR. On these two props no more shalt thou support
Thy wandering steps; but since thou wilt o'ercome
Thy country and thy friends, at whose command
I, though their sovereign, do this; have thy will,
O'ercome: yet thou wilt know in time, I ween,
That neither what thou now hast done avails
To thee for good, nor what thou didst of old;
The counsels of thy friends thy pride disdain'd,
And rage indulged hath always work'd thee woes.
CHOR. Stranger, thou movest not hence.
CR. Off; touch me not.
CHOR. Of these bereaved I will not quit my hold.

CR. Thy state with heavier ransom wilt thou charge;
For not these virgins only will I seize.
CHOR. To what now wilt thou turn thee?
CR. I will seize
And bear this old man hence.
CHOR. A perilous threat.
CR. But soon to be accomplish'd, if the king,
The sovereign of this land, restrain me not.
ŒDIP. Me, shameless babbler, wilt thou dare to touch?
CR. I charge thee be thou silent.
ŒDIP. Silent! no;
May not these awful pow'rs restrain my tongue
From one curse more, this curse on thee, vile man,
Who from my sightless steps hast drawn by force
My tender guide! For this may yon bright god,
Th' all-seeing sun, give thee and all thy race
To close your lives with an old age like mine!
CR. Ye natives of this country, see you this?
ŒDIP. They see both me and thee, and they perceive
That wrong'd by deeds in words I seek revenge.
CR. No longer will I check my rage, but hence
Drag him by force, though here I am alone,
And slow through age.
ŒDIP. Ah me, unhappy me!
CHOR. Presumptuous stranger, hither darest thou come
With thoughts to do such deeds?
CR. Such are my thoughts.
CHOR. This state then I esteem a state no more.
CR. In a just cause the weak subdue the strong.
ŒDIP. Hear you his threats?
CHOR. They shall not have effect.
CR. That Jove may know, not thou.
CHOR. What insult this!
CR. An insult thou must bear.

CHOR. My countrymen
Come forth, with all your forces come! Ye chiefs
Advance, with speed advance; for now the tide
Of headlong violence o'erflows all bounds.

THESEUS, ŒDIPUS, CREON, CHORUS.

THES. What means this cry? What outrage raised your fears,
That at the altar while the victim bleeds
An offering to the monarch of the sea,
The god o'er this Colonus who presides,
You call me? Speak, inform me what the cause
That urged me hither with uneasy speed?

ŒDIP. My generous friend, for well I know thy voice,
Dreadful my recent sufferings from this man.

THES. What hast thou suffer'd? Who hath wrong'd thee? Speak.

ŒDIP. This Creon, whom thou seest, has forced from me
My daughters, the sole comfort of my woes.

THES. How say'st thou?

ŒDIP. My fresh sufferings thou hast heard.

THES. Of my attendants one with swiftest pace
Hence to the altar, bear this charge to all
Th' assembled people, from the sacred rites
Horsemen and troops of foot to wing their speed,
And seize the strait where the two roads unite,
Ere there the virgins pass. I should be held
In scorn if, when my faith is pledged, by force
I were defeated. Go as I command,
And use thy utmost speed. But for this man,
Were I by anger prompted, as his deeds
Deserve, unwounded by my vengeful hand
I should not suffer him go hence. But now,
Since his own laws he brought, to those same laws
His treatment shall accord; for from this land
Thou never shalt depart, till thou hast brought

The virgins back, and placed them in my sight.
For thou hast done what foul dishonour casts
On me, on thy high lineage, and thy land:
A country hast thou enter'd, which reveres
The voice of justice, and ne'er dares a deed
That violates the laws; her sacred rights
Hast thou o'erleap'd, and rushing in by force
Bearest hence thy spoil, deeming perchance my realm
Of force devoid, and sunk with servile fear,
And me some spiritless and abject wretch.
Thebes taught thee not this ruffian deed, nor loves
To cherish the unjust; nor would her voice
Hail thee with acclamations, if she knew
That thou hast plunder'd me, and seized by force
Unhappy men, the suppliants of the gods.
Thy country had I enter'd, were my claims
Most just, without the sovereign of the land,
Whoe'er he were, thence nothing had I drawn
Or forced away; well knowing how behoves
A stranger in a foreign land to frame
His fair demeanour: but thy deeds disgrace
Thy country, not deserving such reproach:
And time in its full course hath made thee old,
And void of wisdom. But I tell thee now,
What I before declared, without delay
Send, let the virgins safe be brought again,
Else in this land constrain'd shalt thou abide
Howe'er unwillingly. I tell thee this,
And my heart speaks accordant with my tongue.

CHOR. Stranger, thou seest thy state, to what reduced,
Since, though thy noble race bespoke thee just,
Thy deeds have proved thee base, and prone to ill.

CR. Neither of puissant force nor counsel sage
Deeming thy realm, O son of Ægeus, void,

Have I here done this deed; but knowing this,
No friendly zeal e'er moved you to sustain
Those of my blood, by force, against my will.
I knew your state would not receive a man
Unholy, with his father's blood distain'd;
His nuptial bed polluted with the guilt
Of incest. Well I knew your awful Court
High on the mount of Mars, for wisdom famed,
Coeval with your land, would ne'er allow
Such outcasts in their city to reside.
On this confiding I presumed to seize
The wretch; nor had I done it, but he pour'd
Such dreadful execrations forth on me
And on my race, that for the wrongs received
I deem'd this meet requital; for the force
Of rage is not abated but by death;
The dead feel no resentment. For these things
Act as thy will inclines thee; thus alone,
Just though my cause, my pow'r is small: yet know
Such as you see me now, whate'er your deeds,
Like deeds will I endeavour to repay.

ŒDIP. Unblushing insolence! falls this reproach
On my hoar head, or on thine own? while thus
Thy tongue descants on murders, nuptial rites,
And miseries which, unhappy, I sustain'd
Of guilt not conscious; so it pleased the gods,
Of old perchance enraged at some offence
Of those from whom I sprung; for fault in me,
To warrant this reproach thou canst not find
Against myself committed, or my house.
For tell me, to my father if the voice
Of oracles declared that he should fall
Slain by his sons, me justly for the deed
Dost thou revile? I had not being then.

If by ill fate (and that ill fate was mine)
I in fierce conflict 'gainst my father stood,
And slew him, nothing knowing whom my hand
Opposed, canst thou revile me for a deed
Unknowingly committed? But, thou wretch,
Dost thou not blush that of my mother's bed
Thou hast constrain'd me to make mention, since
She was thy sister? I will speak of it
Briefly (for what would silence now avail?)
Since thy unhallow'd tongue hath touch'd that point.
She brought me forth, ah me! she brought me forth,
O my unhappy fate! then bore me sons,
Her foul reproach, unconscious I of guilt,
Of guilt unconscious she. But this I know,
Me thou hast willingly reviled, and her;
Unwillingly I wedded her, and now
Unwillingly speak this. Yet shall my name
Fear from these nuptials no reviling tongue,
Nor from my father's death, the constant theme
Of thy malignant censure: for with truth
Answer me this, should one with boisterous force
Instant attack thy life, no wrong by thee
First offer'd, wou'dst thou nice inquiry make
Whether thy father made the rude assault;
Or wou'dst thou in a moment strive t' avenge
The wrong? I think, if that thou lovest thy life,
Thou wou'dst avenge thee of the ruffian strait,
Nor with slow caution ponder what is right.
On ills like these with erring steps I ran,
Led by the gods? nor would my father's shade,
Could it return to life, I think, reply
Opposing my just plea. But thou, whose soul
No justice rules, prompted by impious pride
To utter all, though honour bids thy tongue

Be silent, in this presence hast presumed
To charge me thus with base and slanderous blame.
Yet canst thou stoop with adulation bland
To fawn on Theseus, and th' Athenian state
As train'd to righteous laws; but 'midst thy praise
Of this forgetful, that if ever land
Knew with due honours to revere the gods,
Athens in this hath high pre-eminence.
Yet in this state thy thievish hand hath seized,
Its hoary supplicant, and borne away
My virgin daughters. Touch'd with wrongs like these
Bending before these awful pow'rs I breathe
My ardent supplications, and invoke
Their succour, their protection, that thy pride
May learn what men are guardians of this state.

CHOR. This stranger hath much merit; and his woes,
In total ruin which have crush'd him down,
Deserve, O king, protection at thy hand.

THES. Enough of words; for while the spoilers haste
We, who have suffer'd wrong, inactive stand.

CR. What to my feeble age are thy commands?

THES. Go on the way before, and be my guide,
That in these regions if the virgins yet
Are held, thou may'st direct me to the place.
If they, who seized them, fly, we need not toil;
For others are abroad, whose swift pursuit
They never shall elude to thank the gods
That from this country they by flight escaped.
Lead thou the way, and know that thou art seized,
As thou hast seized; the hunter fortune takes
In his own toils; for things by fraud obtain'd,
And unjust violence, abide not long.
Thy hope of aid shall fail thee; for I know
With such small force, for such a rude attempt

Unfurnish'd thus, thy spirit had not swell'd
To this proud height; there is in whose support
Confiding thou hast dared the deed: but this
Demands attention; not to yield this state
A prey to one invader. Are my words
To thy conception clear; or seem they vain,
As when thy thoughts this insult first devised?

CR. Nothing of what is said I here can blame;
At home what best behoves us we shall know.

THES. Go now, hereafter threaten. Thou with us
Remain in quiet, Œdipus, assured
I will not rest, unless I first should die,
Till to thy wish thy daughters I restore.

ŒDIP. Be thou blest, Theseus, for thy generous mind,
And for thy just protection of my age!

ŒDIPUS, CHORUS.

CHORUS.

STRO. 1. Were I where the dauntless train
Swells the battle's brazen roar;
On the hallow'd Pythian plain;
Or the torch-illumined shore,
Where for men their holy flame
O'er the sacred Mysteries wakes,
And 'mongst Priests of honour'd name
Where his station Silence takes,

L. 1103. The Chorus, concluding that an engagement must ensue, wish themselves with their brave countrymen when they should overtake the forces of Creon, whether it were in the plains of Marathon characterised by the Temple there dedicated to the Pythian Apollo, or on the shores of Eleusis, or near Leucogeos the domain of the tribe of Oia. Confiding in the valour of their troops they indulge the joyful presages of victory, and address the gods with prayers for their country, their king, and his attendants. This is in the true spirit of a brave and religious people.

L. 1110. This alludes to the religious silence observed in the Eleusinian

Wont his golden key to bear
In his firm tongue-locking hand!
There the warrior Theseus, there
Join'd the virgin sisters stand;
There they shall soon the conflict share,
And pour the torrent rage of war.

ANTIS. 1. Westward haply on the plain,
Where the white and rocky steep
Tow'rs o'er Oia's rich domain,
May th' ensanguin'd battle sweep:
Where impetuous in their speed,
Glowing with the flames of war,
Warriors spur the foaming steed,
Other warriors roll the car.
Brave the youths who here reside,
Brave th' Athenian troops in fight;
Shine their reins with martial pride,
All their trappings glitter bright;
These honours in their rich array
To Pallas all and Neptune pay.

STRO. 2. Is the dreadful work begun?
Or does ought their force delay?
O let me give the glad presages way!
Soon shall yon bright ethereal sun
Behold him, vaunting now no more,
Compell'd th' afflicted virgin to restore,
Afflicted through her father's woes.
Each day some deed effected shows,
The ruling hand of righteous Jove.
I am the prophet of a prosperous fight.
Had I the pennons of a dove

Mysteries. These Priests were called Eumolpidæ, from Eumolpus the first Hierophant.

High o'er the clouds to whirl my flight,
Then should my raptured eyes behold
The victory my thoughts foretold.

ANTIS. 2. Thou in heav'n's high throne ador'd,
Sovereign of the gods above,
Give strength, O pow'rful all-beholding Jove,
Give conquest to my country's lord;
With glory mark his purple way,
And make the ambush'd foe an easy prey!
Pallas, propitious hear my pray'r,
And show that Athens is thy care!
Thee, Hunter Phœbus, skill'd to trace
The sylvan savage in his rapid flight;
Thee, whom the pleasures in the chase
Of the fleet, spotted hind delight,
Thee I implore, chaste Huntress Maid,
Aid her brave sons, our country aid!

CHOR. Thou shalt not, stranger, of thy watchman speak
As a false augur; for mine eyes behold
The virgins: they return, with hasty steps
Advancing nigh.

ŒDIP. Where, where? what say'st thou? how?

THESEUS, ANTIGONE, ISMENE, ŒDIPUS, CHORUS.

ANT. My father, O my father, would some god
Give thee to see this best of men, who thus
Hath brought us back to thee!

ŒDIP. My children here!
Are you both here, my children?

ANT. By the hands
Of Theseus, and his brave attendants, saved.

ŒDIP. Come near, my children; and, what ne'er again
We could e'en hope, support me with your arms.

ANT. Obtain thy wish; we grant it with delight.
ŒDIP. Where are you then?
ANT. Together we approach.
ŒDIP. O my dear blossoms!
ANT. To a father all
Is dear.
ŒDIP. Ye tender props of my old age!
ANT. Unhappy props of an unhappy man.
ŒDIP. What is most dear to me I hold; and now
Were I to die whilst you thus near me stand,
I should not be quite wretched: but support,
On each side prop me, growing to the trunk
From which you sprung; to an afflicted wretch
Outcast, and late abandon'd, give some rest.
What hath been done now tell me, but in brief,
A short relation will from you suffice.
ANT. Theseus is here, who sav'd us; it is meet
Thou learn from him: so shall my words be brief.
ŒDIP. My daughters thus beyond my hopes restored,
Marvel not, generous Theseus, if my words
Exceed due measure. Well I know from thee,
And thee alone, this dear delight, in them
Which I receive, is giv'n me; for thy hand,
And thine alone, preserved them. May the gods
On thee and on thy state their blessings pour
Ample as my warm wishes; for 'mongst you
Only of all mankind have I discern'd
A reverence for the gods, a fix'd regard
For justice, and a manly love of truth.
The worth, which I have proved, my words extol,
For what I have, I have from thee alone.
Disdain not then, O king, to stretch the hand
That I may touch it, and, with leave obtain'd,
Kiss thee. What have I said? How then can I,

Born wretched, wish to touch a man, whom stain
Of ill hath ne'er approach'd? It shall not be:
Such grace must be refused. Of all mankind
Those only, who have suffer'd ills, can feel
A touch of pity for my ills. I now
Bid thee henceforth farewell; and let thy care,
Thus far extended to a wretch like me,
Through what of life is left me, yet extend.

THES. I marvel not that many are thy words
Through pleasure that thy daughters are restored;
Nor that, ere mine, thou joy'dst in their address.
These things with me are trivial, of no weight,
I have no care aught splendid in my life
To show in words, but honourable deeds;
And let these speak: I pledged to thee my faith;
In nothing I deceived thee, but have brought
These virgins back alive, and from his threats
Uninjured: how this contest was achieved
Why should I vaunt? In private thou may'st learn
From them. But to an incident which late
Occurr'd, as hither I return'd, attend.
Things of small semblance oft with import high
Are pregnant: prudence slights no circumstance.

ŒDIP. Of this, O son of Ægeus, uninform'd
I wish a full relation and distinct.

THES. A man, they say, no habitant of Thebes,
But to thy blood allied, a suppliant sits
At Neptune's altar, where the victim slain
I offer'd when I hasten'd at your cries.

ŒDIP. Whence is he? In this hallow'd seat why placed?

THES. I know but this, short conference he requests
With thee, in nothing to molest thee more.

ŒDIP. Why this? No trivial cause hath placed him there.

THES. With thee he wishes to converse, and asks

Permission thence in safety to return.

ŒDIP. Who can this be that near the altar sits?

THES. At Argos is there none to thee allied,
Who may with ardour wish this grace from thee?

ŒDIP. My honour'd friend, forbear.

THES. Why thus disturb'd?

ŒDIP. No more entreat.....

THES. What may I not entreat?

ŒDIP. What I have heard shows who the suppliant is.

THES. Say who, that his attempt I may rebuke.

ŒDIP. It is my hated son: of all mankind
Him with most pain should I endure to hear.

THES. Yet thou may'st hear, nor yield to his request,
Thy will averse: to hear can give no pain.

ŒDIP. His voice, O king, is to a father's ear
Most hateful: urge me not perforce to yield.

THES. But if his seat compels to this, take heed,
The sanction of the god must be revered.

ANT. Hear me, my father, nor despise my youth.
Indulge this man, assenting to his wish
And to the god, in what his soul desires.
Refuse us not, but let my brother come.
His words, though ill accorded to thy state,
Thee from thy stedfast purpose will not draw
By force: what ill from hearing words can rise?
The honourable purpose of the heart
Is signified by words. Nay, weigh this well,
Thou art his father: though his deeds to thee
Be of the vilest, the most impious, right
Wills not that thou repay him like ill deeds;
His own will bring their vengeance. Impious sons
Have injured other parents, and have raised
Anger as fierce; but by th' advice of friends
This harshness hath been charm'd e'en to assume

A milder nature. On th' afflicting ills
Thy soul has suffer'd for thy parents' sake
Reflect not now; dismiss them from thy thoughts,
Adverting only to the dire effects
Of raging anger; those thou soon may'st know;
For violent the proofs of this thou bearest,
Thy orbs of sight extinguish'd. Yield thee then;
Ill it becomes thee that a just request
Repeatedly be urged, or that a grace
Received with grace thou know'st not to repay.

ŒDIP. Your painful pleasure thus declared, my child,
You overcome me: be it as you will.
Only if hither he must come, my friend,
Protect me, o'er my life let none have pow'r.

THES. Of this enough: it is not mine to boast.
Me if the gods protect, be thou assured
Old man, in my protection thou art safe.

ŒDIPUS, ANTIGONE, ISMENE, CHORUS.

CHORUS.

STRO. Beyond the bounds to strength assign'd
Hast thou a wish t' extend life's lingering day?
With heedful eye my state survey,
And learn that thoughtless folly rules thy mind.
For years thus lengthen'd in their train
Bring nearer weakness, grief, and pain.
But be thy wish indulged beyond its height,
Nought shalt thou see that yields delight;
Insatiate to the tomb no bound it knows,
Though Hymen's torch no longer glows,
No choral lyre now charms the ears,
And slow-approaching Death to close the scene appears.

ANTIS. Not to be born is heav'n's first grace:
If born, extinguish'd soon the vital flame,

Back to return whence late he came,
Is heav'n's next blessing to man's wretched race.
Youth comes, and with him leads a train
Of idle follies, pleasures vain:
Thence rugged toil attends his mazy way,
And Misery marks him for her prey.
Sedition, Envy, Murder, Passion, Strife
Spread horror o'er his path of life;
These to the hated mansions lead
Where cheerless, friendless Age reclines his drooping head.

EPOD. Not mine alone these ills to know,
But on some bleak and rocky shore
As storms and dashing billows roar,
So on his hapless, hoary brow
Waves heap'd on waves without control
The tempests of affliction roll;
Some from those tracts impetuous sweep,
Where the sun skirts the western deep;
Some, where he gilds the orient day;
Some, where he beams his noontide ray;
Some, where Arcturus in his height
Flames o'er the bosom of the night.

ANT. Hither the stranger takes his way; alone
He comes, my father; gushing from his eyes
Fast flow the tears.

ŒDIP. Who is he?

ANT. Whom before
We deem'd him, Polynices: he is here.

POLYNICES, ŒDIPUS, ANTIGONE, ISMENE, CHORUS.

POLY. Alas, my sisters, 'midst these various ills
My own misfortunes shall I first bewail,
Or those which on my father's hoary head

I see have fall'n, whom, in a foreign land,
Exiled, by you attended I have found?
But how attired! his mean and squalid garb,
Worn bare by length of time, his aged limbs
Contaminates; and on his eyeless head
His matted locks by each rude gale are waved;
And to his garb akin his wretched food
But ill supports him. Late, too late I know
The ruin I have caused. I call the gods
To witness, vile, flagitious as I am,
I come with wholesome food to cherish thee,
And lighten thy accumulated woes.
E'en by the side of Jove and on his throne
Sits Moderation tempering every act:
Nigh thee, my father, let her stand. Offence,
Though not to be extinguish'd, may be heal'd.
Why art thou silent? O my father speak,
Speak something to me; turn not from me thus.
Wilt thou not answer me, not e'en a word,
But send me thus with mute contempt away,
Nor why thine anger burns declare? But you,
Ye daughters of this man, my sisters, speak,
Plead with my father for me, try to move
His unrelenting heart; nor let him send
The suppliant of the god dishonour'd hence,
A word to me disdaining to reply.

ANT. Speak, my unhappy brother, speak thyself
What sad occasion brought thee hither. Oft
Words as they flow delighting, or perchance
Offending, or to pity soothing mild,
Have giv'n a voice e'en to a speechless tongue.

POLY. Then I will speak, for well hast thou advised,
Imploring first this god, that he would deign
To be my guardian, at whose altar placed

The sovereign of this country raising me
Gave me to come, to hold free converse here,
And back in safety to return. And this
Of you, O strangers, of my sisters this,
This of my father wish I to obtain.
To thee, my father, I would now unfold
Why I am here. From my paternal realms
I am driv'n forth an exile, on thy throne
Because I aim'd in regal state to sit,
My birth-right; but Eteocles, to years
By nature less indebted, thrust me out,
Not in just right triumphant, nor his claim
Brought to the proof of arms, or noble deeds,
But winning with insidious arts the state.
Of this I know, and from the Seers have heard,
That the chief cause was thy infuriate curse.
In Doric Argos I sought refuge; there
The daughter of Adrastus made my bride,
Associates in my cause I raised the Chiefs,
Lords of the Apian land, and honour'd high
For martial deeds; that I 'gainst Thebes might lead
Seven bands commanded by seven valiant Chiefs,
And bravely die, or from my country chase
Those who have wrong'd me. But of this enough.
What sanction, hither coming, claim I then?
To thee, my father, supplicating pray'rs,
For me, and my compeers in arms, I bring,
Who with seven bands beneath seven spears arranged,
Are now encamp'd o'er all the plain of Thebes.
In martial prowess first, and first in skill
To mark the flight of birds, Amphiaraus;
Ætolian Tydeus marches next, the son
Of Œneus; and next him of Argive race
Eteoclus; there tow'rs Hippomedon

Sent by his father Talăus ; in arms
Advances Capaneus with menace high
Instant to rend the rampires to the ground.
Parthenopæus, an Arcadian, fierce
Advances, from his mother's virgin state
His name deriving, the undoubted son
Of Atalanta. I these chiefs among,
Thy son, or if not thine, at least the son
Of unpropitious Fortune, yet call'd thine,
Lead against Thebes th' intrepid Argive troops.
By these thy daughters, by thy life, we all
Suppliant entreat thee, O my father, yield,
Remit thy anger, raging 'gainst this wretch
Now roused in arms t' avenge the wrongs sustain'd
From a base brother, who hath driv'n me out,
And robb'd me of my kingdom. But the fates,
If there be faith in oracles, declare
That where thou art, there Victory attends.
Now by our country's fountains, by her gods,
Let, I implore thee, my entreaties touch
Thy heart; be thou appeased ; for I, like thee,
Am poor, and wander in a foreign land;
One fate to us assign'd, to thee and me,
Submissive to another's will we live.
He lives in royal state, unhappy me!
And 'midst luxurious pleasures laughs alike
At thee and me. But if thy fav'ring mind
Accord with mine, him with no mighty toil,
No arduous effort, will I put to flight,
And lead thee back, replace thee in thy house,
Replace myself, and drive him out by force.
This boast, if thou assent, I will achieve;
But without thee my efforts have no pow'r.

CHOR. In reverence to the king make some reply,

Such as thou judgest meet, then let him go.

ŒDIP. But that the sovereign of this land, my friends,
Had sent him to me, and esteems it just
That I should answer him, he had not heard
My voice: that grace now deign'd, let him begone;
Nor will he find a joy in what he hears.
For thou, vile wretch, the sceptre and the throne
Holding, which now thy brother holds at Thebes,
Didst drive thy father out, by thee constrain'd
An exile from my country far to rove,
And wear these loathsome weeds; the sight of which
Draws tears from thee, by fortune now reduced
To suffer want and wretchedness like mine.
These things I must not weep, but I must bear;
And always keep alive, whilst I shall live,
The memory of thy impious deed; for thou
Hast made me long familiar with these toils,
Thou hast to exile driv'n me, and by thee
I wander thus, from strangers day by day
Begging a poor subsistence. Were not these
My daughters, had they not with tender care
Supported me, long since (to thee no thanks)
My life had been no more: but these preserve,
These cherish me, in bearing toils with me
These take, beyond their sex, a manly part.
But you, my sons...Away, you are not mine.
For this cause fortune looks upon thee now
Not as she soon will look, when thou shalt lead
These troops to Thebes: it is not in thy fate
To rend her rampires down, but there to fall
Welt'ring in blood; such too thy brother's fate.
These curses on you I before denounced,
And now as my associates call them down,
That to a parent you may learn to show

Due reverence, nor disdain a father more
Though blind. My daughters have not been thus base;
Therefore thy seat, thy throne shall they possess;
Since Justice long renown'd, by laws of old
Establish'd, shares th' imperial throne of Jove.
But get thee hence, thou hast no father here,
Detested wretch, thou vilest of the vile,
And take these curses with thee, on thy head
Which I call down: by arms thy native land
Never may'st thou recover, nor again
Visit the vales of Argos; may'st thou die
Slain by thy brother's hand, and may thy hand
Slay him, by whom thou art to exile driv'n.
These curses I call on thee, and invoke
The parent gloom of Erebus abhorr'd
To give thee in his dark Tartarean realms
A mansion: I invoke these awful pow'rs,
And the stern god of war, who 'twixt you raised
This horrible hate. Thou hast my answer; go,
Tell all the Thebans, tell thy faithful friends
Confederate in thy cause, that Œdipus
Confers this meed of merit on his sons.

CHOR. No gratulation, youth, on thy success
Have I to give thee: now with speed return.

POLY. Much for my journey hither I lament,
Much for my ill success; but for my friends
I feel a deeper anguish. Wretched me!
Is this then the event that waits our march
In arms from Argos, never to return!
This to no friend, not one, shall I make known,
That must not be, but silent meet my fate.
But, O my sisters, since the dreadful curse
Of my relentless father you have heard,
Do not, should all its cruel menace find

Like terrible effect, and should you e'er
Return to Thebes, ah! do not, by the gods,
Leave me unhonour'd, but with funeral rites
Lay my dead body in the tomb. The praise,
Which for a father your unwearied toils
Have won you now, will equal glory win,
If you perform these offices for me.

ANT. O Polynices, let my pray'rs prevail!

POLY. My loved Antigone, what wou'dst thou? Speak.

ANT. Lead back thy troops to Argos, nor destroy
With wasting war thy country, and thyself.

POLY. That cannot be; for if I now show fear,
How shall I raise such martial force again?

ANT. And why again shou'dst thou be fired to rage?
Or in thy country's ruin what thy gain?

POLY. Oh, what a shame is exile, what a shame
To bear a younger brother's taunting scorn!

ANT. Yet hast thou heard my father's words denounce
Death to you both, each by the other slain.

POLY. Such were his words; but me they must not move.

ANT. Unhappy me! But who will madly dare
Attend thee, hearing his prophetic voice?

POLY. They shall not hear such omens: a brave Chief
Will speak what raises courage, not despair.

ANT. Is this, my brother, thy resolved intent?

POLY. It is: detain me not: this warlike march
Shall be my care, though ruin, woe, and death
Await it through my father's ruthless curse.
To you be Jove propitious, if you pay
These rites to me when dead, for ne'er again
Shall I alive your tender care receive.
Nay, hold me not, but take my last farewell,
For living never shall you see me more.

ANT. Wretched Antigone!

POLY. Lament me not.
ANT. Who can behold a brother rush on death,
With open eyes, and not lament his fate?
POLY. If my fate calls me, I will die.
ANT. Thy death
Yet shun; yet hear me; let me yet prevail.
POLY. Urge not what honour wills not that I grant.
ANT. Of thee bereaved how wretched shall I be!
POLY. These things are in the fates, whether to good
Thy life be doom'd, or ill. May never ill,
I pray the gods, reach you, by all esteem'd
Unworthy what affliction is to feel.

ŒDIPUS, ANTIGONE, ISMENE, CHORUS.

CHOR. These are new ills; these horrible events,
Late from this eyeless stranger learnt, are new,
If fate assigns no refuge; but my voice
Knows not to say what the gods decree
Fails of its purpose. Time beholds these things,
Always beholds them; ills of old announced
He saw confirm'd, and hastens in his course
To see the measure of affliction full.——
Almighty Jove, what thunders rend the air
ŒDIP. My daughters, O my daughters, to this place
Is there the generous Theseus who will bring?
ANT. His presence what of moment here requires!
ŒDIP. Soon will this winged thunder of high Jove
Lead me to Pluto's realms. Send then with speed.
CHOR. Awfully dreadful is this deep'ning roar
Roll'd by the hand of Jove: my hoary hairs
Are rais'd through horror upright on my head,
And my soul sinks within me.—There again
The rapid lightening flames along the sky.
What terrible event doth this portend?

The dread of it appals me: not in vain,
Not unpredictive of some dreadful fate
These thunders roll.—Almighty Jove! again
Wide through th' ethereal vault of heav'n they roll.

ŒDIP. This, O my daughters, is the fated day
That ends my life: there is no refuge more.

CHOR. How know'st thou this? Whence hast thou thus divined?

ŒDIP. I know it well: but with the utmost speed
Be your illustrious sovereign hither call'd.

CHOR. Ah me, ah me! Again the thunder's roar
Around us with redoubled fury rolls.
Be merciful, O God, if to this land,
My native country, aught of dire event
Thou bringest, yet be merciful to me;
Nor let me share misfortune as my meed,
Because this man with fated woes oppress'd
I saw: Almighty Jove, on thee I call!

ŒDIP. Is the king near, my daughters, that alive
He yet may find me, and my sense entire?

CHOR. What to his secret faith wou'dst thou confide?

ŒDIP. My promise, when his kindness I received,
No trivial favour, I would now return.

CHOR. Hither, my son, haste hither, if perchance
On the shore's lowest verge thy pious hand
Burns offerings on the altar to the god,
That rules the ocean, hallow'd, hither come.
The stranger, grateful for thy courteous deeds,
Just recompense to thee, thy state, thy friends
Wishes to pay: come then, O king, with speed.

THESEUS, ŒDIPUS, ANTIGONE, ISMENE, CHORUS.

THES. Again these cries! What mean they? for distinct
I hear your voices, I the stranger's hear.

Hath Jove's fierce lightening, or the stormy hail
Burst on your heads? Such terrible events
Oft happen, when the god his thunder rolls.

ŒDIP. Thou to my wish, O king, art come; some god,
To crown thy happy fortune, led thy steps.

THES. What, son of Laius, hath arisen now?

ŒDIP. My life draws tow'rds its end; let me perform,
In nothing false, to thee and to thy state
What I affirm'd; then willingly I die.

THES. What proof assures thee that thy death is nigh?

ŒDIP. The gods, the gods themselves, whose voice is truth,
Proclaim it to me now by signs foretold.

THES. What signs, old man, have this event declared?

ŒDIP. These unremitting thunders, and these flames
Thick flashing, hurl'd by Jove's resistless hand.

THES. I in thy words have faith; for I have mark'd
In many things thy fate-predicting mind,
In nothing false: say then what must be done.

ŒDIP. Now, son of Ægeus, I will show thee things
Glorious to thee and to thy state, which time
Shall never darken. To the fated place
Where I must die I now will lead the way,
Not led, nor guided: but to mortal man
Never disclose the secret spot, nor where
It lies; it shall be then thy strong defence
For ever, more than close-compacted shields
And spears of neighbouring states to thee allied.
But things mysterious, not as yet by words
Unfolded, thou shalt learn when thither come
Alone: to none of all thy citizens,
Nor to my daughters to my soul though dear,
Would I reveal them: lock them in thy breast:
But when thy life approaches to its end,

Declare them only to the Chief that stands
In highest honour; to his successor
Let him disclose them. Thus thy royal seat
Shall in this city stand impregnable
To all the inroads of the dragon-race.
For oft we see that states, though founded well
On righteous laws, are prone t' abuse their force
To insolent oppression: but the gods
Exact, though late, observe when one disdains
Their holy mandates, and to madness turns.
That, son of Ægeus, that be far from thee.
But I instruct a mind in all the parts
Of virtue skill'd. Now go we to the place
(For the strong impulse of the god I feel
Urging me on) nor fear lest we profane
The sanctity we reverence. Follow me
This way, my daughters; I am now become
A guide to you, as to your father long
You have been guides. Go then, but touch me not;
Let me unguided find the sacred tomb,
Where these old limbs are destined to repose
Beneath the earth. Go this way, this way go;
For this way Hermes, who conducts the dead,
Leads me, and she o'er the dark realms who reigns.
O light, thy beams though I no more behold,
(Once I beheld them) now these aged limbs
Feel thy last touch; with feeble steps I go
To close my last of life in death's dark shades.
But be thou blest, my noble, honour'd friend,
Thou, and thy country, and thy faithful train:
Yet 'midst success, 'midst glories always yours,
Think on the dead, remember Œdipus.

CHORUS.

STRO. If I may thee, infernal Queen,
Thou gloomy pow'r by mortal eyes unseen,
With holy awe revere;
And thee, stern Monarch, whose terrific sway
The dreary realms of night obey,
Hear Pluto, Pluto hear!
Let not pangs of tort'ring pow'r
Rack the stranger's dying hour,
While the cheerless path he treads
To the Stygian house that leads,
Guiltless thou wast doom'd to know
Various ills and bitter woe;
May the god with just regard
Grace thee with a bright reward!

ANTIS. Ye awful pow'rs, from realms of night,
Who vengeful rise the guilty to affright!
And thou, grim Dog of Hell,
Before the iron gates of Pluto spread
Enormous on thy horrid bed,
With many a hideous yell
Whilst thy echoing cave resounds,
Guarding fierce those dismal bounds;
Thou, whom Earth to Tartarus bore,
Cease, oh cease thy dreaded roar;
Gentle meet him in those glades,
When he joins the silent shades;
Ever wakeful, cease t' appal;
Dog of Hell on thee I call!

COLONIATE, CHORUS.

COL. Few words, my fellow citizens, may speak
That Œdipus is dead; but not in few
The manner, and each awful circumstance

Attending that event, can I relate.

CHOR. Is then th' unhappy man no more!

COL. Know this,

For ever he hath left this mortal life.

CHOR. Favour'd by heav'n his death, and void of pain?

COL. This yet demands astonishment. Thou know'st,
For thou wast present, how he parted hence,
Led by no friend, but to us all a guide.
When he approach'd the rent rock's craggy verge
With steps of brass deep rooted in the earth,
Where many broken passes wind along,
In one of these near the gulf's yawning mouth
He stood, where Theseus and Pirithous placed
Th' eternal pledges of their mutual faith:
There in the midst between Acherdus steep
And the Thorician rock on a raised stone
Himself he seated, and his squalid weeds
Ungirding to his daughters gave command
To bring him lavers and libations pure
Of living water. To the mount, thence seen,
Of Ceres cloth'd in lively green they went
Hasting their father's orders to perform,
With lavers cleansed, and in a decent robe
Array'd him, as funereal rites require.
These pleasing offices, and all whate'er
His soul could wish, perform'd, the Stygian Jove
Thunder'd beneath; the virgins, as they heard,
Trembled with horror, at their father's feet
Fell down, and wept, beating their breasts with loud
And long laments. But he, the dreadful sound
Soon as he heard, embraced them in his arms,

L. 1693. Mention was before made of the "brazen way." These steps were supposed to lead down to the infernal realms.

And said, my daughters, on this fated day
You have no more a father; what was mine
Is all rent from me, and the task no more
Is yours my poor subsistence to provide,
A painful task, I know; but one short word
Sweetens all toils; for greater love from none
Than from your father can you e'er receive;
Now you will pass your lives of him deprived.
Thus mournfully, in close embraces lock'd,
They all lamented: but at length their shrieks
Arose no more, the cries of grief were hush'd,
And all was silence. Suddenly a voice
Call'd him aloud: awe-struck we stood aghast:
Again, and oft it call'd, "Œdipus,
"Why, Œdipus, delay we to depart?
"Thine this delay." Soon as he heard the god
Thus calling him, the royal Theseus nigh
He bids approach, and said, my honour'd friend,
Thy hand, the well-proved pledge of former faith,
Give to my daughters; and, my children, give
Your hands to him; and promise that thou ne'er
Wilt willingly betray them, but perform
Always benevolent whate'er thy thought
Shall tell thee will to their advantage tend.
The generous king suppress'd his tears, and gave
His hand, his promise with a solemn oath
Confirming. This accomplish'd, Œdipus
His daughters in his feeble arms embrac'd,
And said, my children, let your generous minds
Not grieve that from this place you must depart;
Nor, what your eyes must not behold, desire
To see; nor, what must not be heard, to hear;
The fates oppose your wish: go then, the hour
Demands it; but alone let Theseus stay

Witness of the event. We heard him speak
These words, and mournful with tear-moisten'd eyes,
Attendant on the virgins left the place.
But in short space we stopp'd, we backwards turn'd
Our eyes; the man was no where to be found;
He was not; but we saw the king alone;
He stood, and o'er his face his hands he spread
Shading his eyes, as if with terror struck
At something horrible to human sight.
Thus long he stood not, but we saw him soon
The Earth adoring, and Olympus high,
Seat of th' immortal gods, with ardent pray'r.
But by what fate he died no mortal man,
Save Theseus, can declare: for not the flames
Thick flashing from the thunders of high Jove
Consumed him, nor the tempest from the sea
Then raging wild; but haply by the gods
Borne thence, or sinking through the friendly earth,
Which in her deeply-rifted bosom open'd
A painless passage to the realms below.
Here is no cause for wailings; for he died
From all the anguish of disease exempt,
A man of all the human race who claims
Our wonder most. If any deem my sense
Not perfect, these events while I relate,
My senses, let them know, are sound as theirs.

CHOR. Where are the virgins and th' attending train?

COL. Not distant far; the voice of weeping heard,
And loud laments, gives sign that they approach.

ANTIGONE, ISMENE, CHORUS.

ANT. Now, wretched as we are, now we must wail
Miseries till now unknown, our father's death,
Which time can ne'er erase: for his dear sake

With patience many a painful toil we bore;
Now, at the last, what miseries must we see
And suffer, miseries dreadful to the sense!

CHOR. What mean'st thou?

ANT. More than thought can comprehend.

CHOR. True, he is gone.

ANT. And so, as most thy soul
Could wish; for not in war, or stormy seas
Found he his death; but obscure unsearch'd tracts,
In some dark fate appearing, snatched him hence.
But on our eyes (unhappy me!) now hangs
The sickly gloom of night: for by what means,
Wandering o'er what strange land, what billowy sea,
Shall we the poor supports of life procure?

ISM. I know not. Oh that ruthless death would take
Me too, unhappy me, that I might die,
Die with my aged father! for in life
What now remains that prompts a wish to live?

CHOR. Most excellent of daughters, what the gods
Assign our lot, submissive to bear well
Becomes us. Check the ardour of your grief;
Be calm; no cause of lamentation here.

ANT. I had a fondness e'en for ills with him;
Things not delightful, whilst these hands sustain'd
His feeble limbs, afforded me delight.
O my loved father, now beneath the earth
Closed in eternal darkness, dear to me
Wast thou in age, and shall be ever dear!

CHOR. He hath obtained.....

ANT. He hath indeed obtain'd
What he wish'd warmly: in a foreign land

L. 1795. ὡς ἔμοιγ' ὁ μέλλων βίος οὐ βιωτός. Cui potest esse vita vitalis? ut ait Ennius....Cicero de Amicitia.

He died, and lodges in eternal shades
Beneath the ground: nor hath he left a grief
That shall forget to weep; for from my eyes
For thee, my father, shall the tears of woe
For ever stream; for nothing can efface
This sorrow deep imprinted on my heart.
Thou shou'dst not in a foreign land have died;
But thou hast died, and left me desolate.

ISM. Me now, unhappy me, what fate awaits,
Helpless, forsaken as I am, and thee,
My sister, of our father thus bereaved!

CHOR. But, ye loved mourners, since his life hath found
An end the best, the happiest, cease your griefs;
For the assaults of misery none escape.

ANT. Hence, my loved sister, let us haste again.

ISM. Whither? with what intent?

ANT. I have a wish,
A strong desire, wretch that I am, to see
Where in his mansion low my father lies.

ISM. How may this be? Reflect, ah wretched me!
He lies without a tomb, deprived of all.....

ANT. Lead me, then kill me. Where henceforth, ah me!
Shall I deserted, friendless, helpless, pass
My miserable life?

CHOR. My mourning friends,
Be not thus troubled.

ANT. Whither shall I fly?

CHOR. You have already fled, where never ill
Shall reach you.

ANT. Grateful I acknowledge this.

CHOR. What further thoughts disturb thy anxious mind?

ANT. I know not how to Thebes I shall return.

CHOR. Think not of that: all is confusion there.

ANT. And was before; one while the swelling tide

O'erflows all bounds; one while it ebbs again.

CHOR. Fortune hath toss'd you on a wide wild sea.

ANT. It hath, it hath.

CHOR. Thy sorrows touch my soul.

ANT. Whither, O Jove, can we direct our steps?
Is there an hope to which the god now leads?

THESEUS, ANTIGONE, ISMENE, CHORUS.

THES. Virgins, restrain your sorrows: to lament
Those in whose tombs such blessings are reposed,
Becomes us not: grief here would merit blame.

ANT. O son of Ægeus, at thy knees we fall.

THES. Of me, O virgins, what would you request?

ANT. We wish to visit our loved father's tomb.

THES. It may not be; this grace I cannot yield.

ANT. What, sovereign lord of Athens, hast thou said?

THES. Your father, virgins, gave me solemn charge
That none approach the place, that none address
With vows the hallow'd ground in which he lies:
Obeying this, he told me I should hold
These realms from hostile insult always safe.
The god my promise heard, and the firm oath
Of Jove which all things hears.

ANT. If such his charge,
With meek submission to his will we yield.
But send us to Ogygian Thebes, if there

L. 1857. By Λαίμων καὶ Διὸς ὅρκος the poet expresses the Ζεὺς ὅρκιος so religiously reverenced by the Grecians. To give this Oath the greater sanctity it is here represented as a god, and invested with the attributes of a god; so Ennius,

O fides alma, apta pinnis, et jusjurandum Jovis!

L. 1860. Ogygian. See Stanley's note on v. 327. of The seven Chiefs against Thebes; or the translator's note on v. 979. of the Persians of Æschylus.

Haply the demon Rage, athirst for blood,
Rushing between our brothers, we may check.

THES. This I will grant, and all that I can do
To work your welfare, and to gratify
Him who, late gone, now lies beneath the earth.
No toil for you my friendly care declines.

CHOR. Cease then, and raise the voice of grief no more;
For all these things are ratified by fate.

It has often been said on the authority of Tully, let it be said once more, and in the words of his elegant Translator, that "Sophocles continued in "extreme old age to write tragedies. As he seemed to neglect his family af- "fairs whilst he was wholly intent on his dramatic compositions; his sons in- "stituted a suit against him in a court of judicature; suggesting that his un- "derstanding was impaired, and praying that he might be removed from the "management of his estate: agreeably to a custom which prevails likewise "in our own country, where if a father of a family by imprudent conduct is "ruining his fortunes, the magistrate commonly interposes and takes the ad- "ministration out of his hands. It is said that when the old bard appeared "in court upon this occasion, he desired that he might be permitted to read "a play which he had lately finished, and which he then held in his hand: "it was his Œdipus in Colonis. His request being granted; after he had "finished the recital he appealed to the judges, whether they could disco- "ver in his performance any symptoms of an insane mind? and the result "was, that the court unanimously dismissed the complainants petition."....
Melmoth's translation of Tully's Essay on Old Age.

"Sophocles had almost attained his hundredth year when he composed "this tragedy; in which the marks of decayed genius are so far from ap- "pearing, that it was deemed by the ancients an unrivalled master-piece of "dramatic poetry." Melmoth from Valerius Maximus.....There are some modern critics who affect to speak of it with contempt. The translator gives it the preference to any of the tragedies of Sophocles;

.....εἰ δὲ μὴ δοκῶ φρονῶν λέγειν,
Οὐκ ἂν παρείμην εἴσι μὴ δοκῶ φρονεῖν.

ANTIGONE.

ANTIGONE.

After the defeat of the Argive army, and the death of the contending brothers, Creon, who succeeded to the throne of Thebes, allowed funeral honours to Eteocles, but commanded the body of Polynices to be cast out unburied, a prey to dogs and ravenous birds, denouncing death to any person who should presume to disobey his edict, and inter the corse. The tender and virtuous Antigone, so illustrious for her filial piety, shines forth on this occasion a bright example of affection to her brother and reverence to the gods; animated with a sense of duty, and unterrified by the menaces of a relentless tyrant, she pays the last sad offices to the unhappy Polynices. This, with its dreadful consequences, is the subject of this very interesting tragedy.

Æschylus gave a slight sketch of this subject,

which Sophocles has here filled up with a masterly hand. Euripides, in his tragedy of the Supplicants, has shown us that the rites of sepulture were considered as the most sacred of laws: we despise their superstition, but we must approve their wisdom in this respect, and reverence their humanity; indeed the feelings of our common nature are nearly the same in all ages and all countries.

The Chorus is composed of some of the principal inhabitants of Thebes, selected for their known attachment and fidelity to the house of Labdacus, and summoned by Creon, as they imagined, to a council; but they soon found that he convened them only to give their sanction to his inhuman and impious edict; they seemed disposed indeed to vindicate the action of Antigone by ascribing it to the impulse of the gods; but the king rebukes them harshly, and they become submissive even to servility; they had a sense of religion and their duty, but "fear had chained their tongues;" nor till Tiresias had alarmed the fears of the tyrant, and they saw his savage mind begin to relent, did they dare to take a decided part in favour of humanity and religion. Had they supported their manly office, and reproved the barbarous insolence of their new Sovereign with the firm and virtuous spirit of Free Men, their conduct would have given elevation and dignity to the drama: but the great poet well knew for whom he wrote; at Athens every thing was po-

litical ; their passions, their prejudices, their pride, and even their diversions took that cast. In the Persian war Thebes had deserted the cause of glory and of Greece, and was besides hostile to the Athenian state; therefore to this generous people animated with resentment, conscious of their own merit, and glowing with all the enthusiasm of civil liberty, nothing could be more pleasing than a representation of their hated enemies under the most contemptible of all circumstances, as slaves to a tyrant.

The Scene is at Thebes before the gates of the palace.

PERSONS OF THE DRAMA.

ANTIGONE

ISMENE

CREON

HÆMON

TIRESIAS

EURYDICE

MESSENGERS

ATTENDANTS

CHORUS, THEBAN SENATORS.

ANTIGONE.

1...18

ANTIGONE, ISMENE.

ANT. My sister, loved Ismene, of the ills
Which sprung from Œdipus conceives thy thought
One by the hand of Jove not brought on us
His sole-surviving children? There is nought
That sinks the soul with anguish, deep distress,
Shame, and disgrace, but in thy ills and mine
I see it all. E'en now what new decree
Is rumour'd by the Chief as late proclaim'd
Through all the city? Know'st thou? Hast thou heard?
Or art thou unacquainted with the ills
Which from our foes advance against our friends?

ISM. To me no tidings of our friends are come,
Pleasing or mournful, since the fatal hour
At once deprived us of our brothers, slain
Each by the other's hand; and this last night
The slaughtering sword hath quell'd the Argive host;
Further than this I know not, nor have heard
Aught of good fortune or affliction more.

ANT. I know it well, and call'd thee forth before
The palace gates, that thou may'st hear alone.
ISM. What is it? Dark and troubled seem thy thoughts.
ANT. Know then that of our brothers Creon deigns
One with a tomb to grace, and casts one forth
Unhonour'd. With all just and solemn rites
Eteocles, they say, beneath the earth
He places, honour'd by the dead below.
But his harsh edict is proclaim'd, that none
Entomb, that none bewail the wretched corse
Of Polynices, doom'd by him to lie
Unwept, unburied, with his flesh to gorge
The ravening birds, whose keen eye marks their prey.
This the good Creon hath, they say, to thee
And me (for I must name myself) enjoin'd;
And hither comes his mandate to proclaim
To those who know it not; no trivial charge,
Nor to be slighted; for whoe'er performs
Aught of these offices, is doom'd to die.
Such is our state; which calls on thee to show
Thy high-born spirit, or degenerate mind.
ISM. What, wretched sister, what can I avail,
Opposing, or obeying his command?
ANT. Wilt thou assist me? Wilt thou share my toils?
Resolve.
ISM. What deed of danger to attempt?
What thy intent?
ANT. Wilt thou with thine assist
My hand, and bear this wretched corse away?
ISM. Wou'dst thou inter him, though the state forbids?
ANT. Mine and thy brother, e'en though thou refuse
Thy social aid, I never will betray.
ISM. Wilt thou, too daring, Creon's mandate scorn?
ANT. He has no right to hold me from my friends.

ISM. Yet, O my sister, to remembrance call
Our father's fate; how odious, how defamed
He perish'd, when confounded with the sense
Of his offences, in his rage he rent
With his own hands his bleeding orbs of sight.
His mother then and wife, to ills on ills
A double title, in the wreathed noose
Died self-destroy'd. Our brothers now, both slain
Each by the other's spear, unhappy youths,
Have in one day one common fate achieved
We now remain sole relics of our house;
Think then how we shall perish by a fate
More wretched still, if we by force infringe
The sovereign pow'r and edict of our lords.
Consider too that we are women, weak
By nature, and unable to contend
With men; thus subject to a stronger pow'r
We must hear this, and what may grieve us more.
I then (of those beneath the earth revered
Imploring pardon, since by force constrain'd)
Will yield obedience to our potent lords.
Attempts beyond our strength no prudence show.

ANT. I would not urge thee; nor, were now thy mind
Prompt to the deed, consent that thou shou'dst act
With me: be such as is thy will to be.
I will inter him; and performing this
Death will be glorious to me; I shall lie
With my dear brother, to my brother dear,
These pious rites discharged; for to the dead
Longer a grace is pleasing than to those
Who live; since there for ever I shall lie.
Do thou, if such thy pleasure, lightly deem
Of sacred things, the honours of the gods.

ISM. I hold them high in honour; but to act
By force against the state were rash and wild.

ANT. Make that thy fair pretence; but I will go,
And for my dearest brother raise a tomb.
ISM. Unhappy sister, how I fear for thee!
ANT. Fear not for me; be thy own life thy care.
ISM. Yet to none other thy intent disclose:
Conceal it: of my silence be assured.
ANT. No, speak it loud: more hateful wilt thou be
If silent; be it then proclaim'd to all.
ISM. Thou hast a warm heart in a dangerous act.
ANT. Pleasing, I know, this act to those whom most
Behoves it me to please.
ISM. Couldst thou effect
Thy purpose; but the deed exceeds thy pow'r.
ANT. When my pow'r fails, I from th' attempt will cease.
ISM. Attempt not things which cannot be achieved.
ANT. Thou wilt be hated e'en by me, if thus
Thou speak, and justly by the dead be held
In hatred. Leave me then, and my design
Thus rash, to put this danger to the proof.
To me no sufferings have that hideous form
Which can affright me from a glorious death.
ISM. Go then, since thus resolved; but know th' attempt
Shows frenzy, though strong friendship to thy friends.

CHORUS.

STRO. 1. Thou Sun, whose orient ray
On rampired Thebes ne'er rose so bright,
At length hast thou display'd thy light,
Eye of the golden day,
Hasting o'er Dirce's sacred streams
To roll sublime thy glorious beams!
The Argive first, who dared to wield
With hostile rage his silver shield,

L. 115. So Euripides distinguishes the Argive troops,

(His thick-embattled martial train
Defeated on th' ensanguin'd plain)
Thou madest to turn his sharp-rein'd steed,
And urge his flight with headlong speed.
He, in the cause of Polynices arm'd,
Our sons with doubtful war alarm'd;
Soar'd like an Eagle o'er the plains below,
And cover'd with his wings of snow
Shrill-screaming hurtled o'er the realm,
With many a glittering lance, and many a crested helm.

ANTIS. 1. Impatient of delay
High o'er our bulwarks on a mound,
With purple spears encircled round,
He ravin'd for his prey.
At our seven gates his warlike pow'rs
In deep array assail'd our tow'rs;
But his pride sunk, to flight constrain'd
Ere with our blood his beak was stain'd;
Ere to our rampires' height aspire
The dark-wreath'd smoke and wasting fire;
Such roar of war, such rout, such dread
The dragon race around him spread.

From our high tow'rs we view the Argive host,
Their white shields glittering to the sun....Phœniss. 1242.

L. 130. There is much confusion here: the Argive Chief is characterised as a shrill-screaming Eagle; the Eagle is then represented as the Argive Chief. Æschylus has described two Eagles of different species; Agamemnon, v. 115.

In plumage one of dusky hue,
And one, his dark wings edged with white.

Sophocles with great judgment selects the latter, in allusion to the silver shields of the Argives.

L. 137. Æschylus has given the same sublime image,

See an orphan race
Reft of the parent eagle, that inwreath'd,

For Jove indignant hears the vaunts of pride,
And checks its frenzy's swelling tide;
He sees them in th' impetuous torrent roll'd,
And glorying in the clash of gold:
He hurls his flames; the Boaster falls,
The shouts of conquest now loud raising on our walls.

STRO. 2. As high the fire he bore
Jove's lightening dash'd him to the ground;
The corse and clashing arms rebound;
The warrior is no more,
Who rushing with resistless force,
Impetuous, frentic in his course,
Breath'd but one little moment past
A sweeping whirlwind's horrid blast.
Undaunted and with matchless might
The sons of Thebes maintain'd the fight,
And Mars triumphant on his car
Directed all the storm of war.
At the seven gates seven Argive warriors raged,
But, Chief with daring Chief engaged,
Left to Tropæan Jove their glittering spoils.
Not such th' unhappy Brothers' toils;
With ruthless spears and ruthless hate
They rush'd victorious both, both shared one common fate.

ANTIS. 2. The queen of glorious name,
To grace her Thebes, in gorgeous state
Her high cars rolling through each gate,
Resplendent Conquest came.
Let war, and arms, and hostile rage
No more your anxious thoughts engage;
To all the temples now advance,

In the dire serpent's spiry volumes, perish'd....Choeph. v. 245.

The allusion to a battle between the dragon and the eagle has here a singular propriety on account of the dragon race of Thebes.

Devote the night to festive dance;
To every god at every shrine,
To Bacchus chief, pay rites divine!
Let Bacchus lead the frolic train,
And swell through Thebes the joyful strain.
But see the royal Creon, whose new sway
The sons of Thebes must now obey,
The gods assigning him this glorious fate,
To council comes in awful state;
And here, by heralds warn'd, we stand,
The sages of the realm, to hear his high command.

CREON, CHORUS.

CR. Since now, ye men of Thebes, the gods, who shook
With many a surging wave this sinking state
Again have raised it from the storm secure,
You by my heralds to attend me here
Selected I have summon'd; for I know
How highly you revered the throne and pow'r
Of Laius; and again when Œdipus
Was king; and, after his disastrous fate,
I saw how firm, how loyal to his sons
Your zeal remain'd; but now, since they are fallen,
Each by the other's hand, in the same day,
By mutual wounds and mutual guilt, the crown
And regal pow'r by right devolve on me
As nearest to the slain by blood allied.
But who can penetrate man's secret thought,
The quality and temper of his soul,
Till by high office put to frequent proof,
And execution of the laws? To me
The Sovereign of a state, who weak of soul
Adheres not to the sagest counsels firm,

But suffers fear to close his lips, appears
Most base and abject; such I deem him now,
And always deem'd: and him, who dearer holds
A private friendship than the secret ties
Which bind him to his country, I esteem
A weak slight man. But I (all-seeing Jove,
Be thou my witness!) ne'er will close my lips
In silence, to my people if I see
A threatening danger, or approaching ill:
And never will I hold that man my friend,
Who to my country bears an hostile mind;
Well knowing that on her we all depend
For safety: whilst that bark securely ploughs
A tranquil sea, we, as we sail, make friends.
I by such rules will raise the Theban state
To higher glory; and allied to these
My edict through the city is proclaim'd
Touching the sons of Œdipus: the youth,
Who fighting for his country greatly died,
In arms illustrious, honour'd in the tomb
I bade them lay, with all the hallow'd rites
Paid to the noblest of the dead below.
But Polynices, who from exile came
Back to his country and his country's gods,
Eager to gorge himself with kindred blood,
And lead these hence as slaves, it is proclaim'd
That none with solemn obsequies entomb,
That none lament; unburied let him lie,
And let his mangled carcase be devour'd
By dogs and birds of prey. Such is my will.
For never to the base will I allow
The honours to the virtuous only due:
But he, who loves my country, shall by me

Alike be honour'd, let him live or die.

CHOR. If towards the foe and towards the friend of Thebes
Son of Menœceus, such thy royal will,
To give each law its force, both on the dead
And us, whoe'er are living here, is thine.

CR. See that my edict be obey'd.

CHOR. That charge
Give to more vigorous youth.

CR. To watch the dead
Guards are assign'd.

CHOR. What more wou'dst thou command?

CR. Not to show grace to those who disobey.

CHOR. None is so mad to be in love with death.

CR. And death shall be his meed: but oft rewards
With treacherous hope bold men to ruin lead.

CREON, MESSENGER, CHORUS.

MESS. I will not say, O king, that I am come
With hasten'd step, and breathless through my speed;
For oft I paused, deep-musing, on my way,
And oft wheel'd round with purpose to return.
My soul with many a forceful argument
Thus reason'd with me, "Why in evil hour
"Goest thou where punishment awaits thee?—Wretch,
"Wilt thou stay lingering here? Should Creon know
"This from some other, how wilt thou escape
"His vengeance?"—Musing thus with anxious thought,
And a slow pace, I made a short way long.
At length it was decided I should come.
E'en though I tell thee nothing, I will speak;
For I am come confiding in the hope
Nothing awaits me more than is decreed.

CR. Why is thy soul distracted with these fears?

MESS. First of myself I wish to speak. This deed

I did not, nor who did it can I say;
Unjustly then on me would vengeance fall.

CR. With wary heed thou dost entrench thee round;
Some recent deed of guilt thou wou'dst relate.

MESS. Danger occasions caution and delay.

CR. Speak then at length, and hence in safety go.

MESS. Now I will tell thee. Some one lately came,
Buried the dead, and went away; the corse
With the dry dust he lightly cover'd o'er,
And duly all the hallow'd rites perform'd.

CR. What say'st thou? Who the man that dared this deed?

MESS. I know not: neither stroke of axe was there,
Nor with a spade the mold cast up; the ground
Was firm, the soil unbroken, nor impress'd
With track of wheels; but he, who did the deed,
Left not a mark behind. When the first watch
Of morning show'd us this, in wild amaze
We stood aghast; for, though no tomb was raised,
The body disappear'd; but the light dust
Thrown o'er it show'd the hasty work of one
Who fear'd profanely to neglect the dead;
For not the trace of savage beast, or dog,
Who gorged with prey had cover'd it, was seen.
Harsh words with mutual clamour now rose high,
Guard charging guard; we almost came to blows,
With none to mediate peace; for each to each
Seem'd to have done the deed, yet proof appear'd
'Gainst none: "I know not" was the voice of all.
The mass of burning iron in our hands
We all were prompt to take, to pass through fire,
To call the gods to witness with firm oath
We did it not, we knew not who design'd,
Or who perform'd the deed. Inquiry now
Was found of no avail, when one proposed
What made us all bend to the earth our heads

Through fear, (and nought against it could we speak,
Nor knew we how to guide our conduct right)
That this bold deed to thee should be disclosed,
And not conceal'd. This purpose was approved;
And me, unhappy me, the lot calls forth
To earn this meed. To me no pleasure this;
No pleasure, well I know, to you I bring.
Unwelcome he, who evil tidings bears.

CHOR. Long hath my mind, O king, been prone to think
That by the impulse of the gods this deed.....

CR. Forbear, my anger ere thou raise, and show
Thy age unwise; it is not to be borne,
This vain surmise. What, think'st thou that the gods
O'er such a wretch their guardian care extend,
And grace his body with a tomb, as one
That well deserved, who came to set on fire
Their pillar'd temples, and rich-gifted shrines,
To waste their favour'd land, and crush its laws?
Seest thou the gods grant honours to the vile?
It is not so. There are among us some
Who brook this ill, and murmuring shake their heads,
With due allegiance to my just command
Disdaining to submit their crested pride:
By these corrupted, and for base rewards,
Some hirelings, well I know, have done this deed.
For never sprung device that teem'd, like gold,
With ills to mortals; cities it lays waste;
Impels men from their country far to roam,
Corrupts the honest mind, its virtuous thought
Changing to deeds of baseness; the ill arts
Of treacherous falshood it has taught, and train'd
To the dark science of all impious works.
But they, who for reward perform'd these things,
Have earn'd in time just vengeance for their meed.

For, as I reverence heav'n's almighty king,
Be thou assured (I speak it with an oath)
Find you the man whose hand prepared this tomb,
Bring him before me, or not death alone
Shall for your fault suffice, but you shall hang
Alive, this heinous act till you disclose;
That, knowing whence your booty may be borne,
You may hereafter plunder; and be taught
That not from all things gain may be derived.
Of those, who grasp at unjust lucre, more
In ruin sink, than triumph in success.

MESS. Wilt thou permit me to reply, or thus
Must I return?

CR. Dost thou not know e'en now
How much thy words offend?

MESS. Hurt they thy ears,
Or do they wound thy mind?

CR. What, wou'dst thou scan
The regions of my pain?

MESS. Thy mind he wounds
Who did the deed, my words offend thy ears.

CR. What a quaint prater this!

MESS. Be thou assured
I never did this daring deed.

CR. For gold
Thou didst it; bartering thy vile life away.

MESS. How cruel is suspicion when unjust!

CR. Now descant on suspicion; but take heed,
Show me who did this act, or you shall say
That punishment on impious gain attends. [*exit.*

MESS. I wish he might be found: but be he seized
Or not, (be that as fortune shall assign)
Me here return'd thou shalt not see again;
For now beyond my hopes, beyond my thoughts

Preserved I bow me thankful to the gods.

CHORUS.

STRO. 1. Where'er we turn our curious eyes,
Wonders through all the works of nature rise;
But Man the chief. The foaming deep,
With all his winds though winter raves,
And round him swell the roaring waves,
Of danger reckless he dares sweep,
The sacred and eternal earth his toil
From year to year unweared rends,
The proud steed to his purpose bends,
And furrows with his rolling plough the soil.

ANTIS. 1. His fine entangling arts ensnare
The feather'd tribes that lightly wing the air.
Each savage which the forest knows,
And all the finny race that glide
Sportive beneath the azure tide,
His line-enwoven nets enclose.
He knows to tame the herds that wander wild;
The stiff-maned horse obeys his hand,
Bends his strong neck to his command,
And the reluctant mountain bull grows mild.

STRO. 2. The modulated voice he taught,
And train'd the mind to harbour virtuous thought
He gave to life a polish'd form,
When first he bade the city rise
A shelter from night's freezing skies,
And the sharp arrows of the storm.
O'er all victorious mounts his active mind:

L. 385. *Δύσομβρα φεύγειν βίλη.* Sophocles terms the hail "the arrows "of the storm." Milton has inverted the metaphor, and termed thick flying arrows "sleet of arrowy shower." The metaphor in either poet is highly poetical; that of Sophocles is conceived with superior boldness.

E'en for disease and racking pain
Some healing balm his arts obtain,
But from the darts of death no refuge find.

ANTIS. 2. Unbounded soars his active thought,
With high device and quick invention fraught:
And now to ill it downward leads;
Generous in virtue now delights,
And prompt to guard its country's rights
Glory o'er all the empire spreads;
To baseness when its wild design descends,
Destruction on the state it draws.
N'er be the man, who spurns the laws,
Placed at my hearth, or rank'd among my friends!

CHOR. I stand astonish'd at this sight: too well
I know her, nor this virgin can deny
To be Antigone. Unhappy child
Of an unhappy father! What means this?
Thee do they lead seized in this mad attempt,
Found disobedient to the king's command?

MESSENGER, ANTIGONE, CHORUS.

MESS. This, be assured, is she that did the deed:
We seized her as the body she interr'd.
But where is Creon?

CHOR. Hither he returns.

CREON, MESSENGER, ANTIGONE, CHORUS.

CR. What hath befall'n? Hath justice reach'd th' offence?

MESS. Never should man, O king, on oath protest
Against a deed; some unseen cause may rise,
And show his former resolution built
On false foundations. By thy threats appall'd
I rashly said I never would return;
Yet with a joy beyond, above all hope,

Above all other pleasure I am come,
Though strong against me stands my oath, and lead
This virgin, whom I found with her own hands
The dead interring. Now no lot was cast,
The unexpected meed is all my own,
Not shared by others. Take her then, O king,
Judge her, convict her: guiltless I am proved,
And rightly from thy threaten'd vengeance free.

CR. Thou bring'st this virgin, for what cause? where found?

MESS. Her hands interr'd the dead. Thou hast the whole.

CR. Hast thou clear proof? From knowledge dost thou speak?

MESS. I saw her burying him to whom those rites
Thy charge forbade. Speak I now plain and clear?

CR. How was she seen? how was she found? How seized?

MESS. I will inform thee of each circumstance.
Under thy dreadful menace to the place
Soon as we came, we swept the dust away,
The dead which cover'd o'er, and laying bare
The putrid body, on the higher ground
In the free wind sate down, th' infectious smell
Avoiding: man urged man, with keen reproach
Utter'd 'gainst him who from the task should shrink.
The hours thus pass'd till in its mid-day height
Stood the sun's radiant orb; the heat was fierce;
When sudden from the ground a fiery wind
Rose in tempestuous whirls, the troubled sky
Its wild rage rent, swept o'er the plain, and smote
The leafy branches of each bending tree;
Now the wide air was fill'd with dust; our eyes
We closed by this ethereal pest annoy'd.
At length a calm succeeds; the virgin then
Is seen, lamenting shrill with plaintive notes,
Like the poor bird that sees her lonely nest
Spoil'd of her young; so when she sees the dead

Exposed uncover'd, she with sorrow wail'd,
And utter'd execrations on the head
Of those who did the deed. With her own hands
Instant the loose dry dust she brings, and pours,
Thrice from a fine-wrought brazen vase she pours
Libations thrice repeated o'er the dead.
We see her thus employ'd, we rush on her,
We seize her, nothing at our sight appall'd.
Both with the former and the present deed
We charg'd her; nothing she denied of all.
Pleasing at once and painful this to me:
That I am free from danger is just cause
Of pleasure; but to danger that I lead
Those whom I highly honour, gives me pain:
But nature so has form'd me, all these things
Than my own safety lighter I esteem.

CR. Say thou, ay thou thus bending to the ground
Thy head, this heinous charge dost thou deny?

ANT. I did it; nor the deed will I deny.

CR. * Thou may'st go hence; go free, where'er thy will
May lead thy steps, acquitted from this blame.
† Now tell me thou, and let thy speech be brief,
My mandate this forbidding didst thou know?

ANT. I knew it; I must know it; wide it spread.

CR. How hast thou dared then to transgress the laws?

ANT. For this just cause, that nor the voice of Jove,
Nor holy Right that with the gods below
Inhabits, e'er to men such laws ordain'd.
Nor of such force thy edicts did I deem,
That, mortal as thou art, thou hast the pow'r
To overthrow the firm unwritten laws
Of the just gods; these are not of to day,
Or yesterday, but through all ages live,

* To the Messenger. † To Antigone.

And none knows whence they sprung. Behoved me not,
Through fear of man's proud will profaning these,
To draw on me the vengeance of the gods.
I knew that I must die: this I had known,
If not proclaim'd by thee: if I shall die
A little ere my time, I shall esteem
Death as a well-earn'd prize. What wretch, that lives,
Like me, with many ills enclosed around,
Would not deem death a prize? That such a doom
Is then assign'd to me, afflicts me not;
But with tame sufferance if a brother's corse
Unburied I had left, that had indeed
Been deep affliction; this excites no grief.
If now my actions seem to thee unwise,
Thy thoughts with wisdom little commerce hold.

CHOR. This daring spirit from her daring sire
The virgin draws, to ills untaught to yield.

CR. But know, the vauntings of the fiercest pride
Sink most: the strong steel rigid from the flames
Through its hard temper brittle may'st thou see,
And soonest shiver'd; the most fiery steed
With a small curb oft govern'd have I known.
Ill suits the arrogant presumptuous mind
Those that are slaves to others. Then she learn'd
This insult, when she overleap'd the laws
Which had the sanction of authority.
And having done the deed, she further adds
Fresh insult, glories in the bold attempt,
And proudly laughs. But I am not a man,
She is the man, if this audacious act
Passes unpunish'd. Though she boasts her birth,
The daughter of my sister, were she sprung
From one more near than all whom Hercian Jove

L. 515. Ἑρκεῖος Ζεὺς, ᾧ βωμοὶ ἐντὸς ἕρκους ἐν τῇ αὐλῇ ἵδρυνται. Burton.

Hath to my blood allied, not e'en those ties
Should save her from the rigour of her fate;
No, nor her sister; for with equal guilt
Her too I charge, associate to entomb
This corse. But call her hither; late I saw
Within her raving and distracted mood.
The guileful mind, that forms its base designs
In darkness, oft such fits of frenzy seize.
But I detest the wretch, who tries to dress,
When caught, his villanies in virtue's garb.

ANT. Wou'dst thou do more than kill me now so caught?

CR. No more: thy death my vengeance will appease.

ANT. Why then delay, since nothing in thy words
To me is pleasing, or will ever please;
Nor will my words be pleasing to thy ear?
A brighter glory whence could I obtain
Than from this deed, a brother's honour'd corse
Entombing? All here present would aloud
Applaud the deed, but fear hath chain'd their tongues,
Amidst their envied greatness kings enjoy
This pow'r, to do and speak whate'er they please.

CR. Dost thou alone of all the Thebans here
See this?

ANT. These also see it, but for thee
They close their lips.

CR. But wou'dst thou not feel shame,
Shou'dst thou from these dissent?

ANT. It is no shame
To reverence a brother.

CR. Was not he,
Whom Thebes entomb'd, thy brother too?

from Harpocration. This Jupiter was the guardian of the house, in the court of which his altar stood.

ANT. He was,
Of the same father and same mother born.
CR. How to the Youth, who for his country died,
Wilt thou show honour——
ANT. This the dead entomb'd
Will not attest.
CR. If equally thou grace
The impious?
ANT. He was not a slave who died,
He was a brother.
CR. Ravaging these realms
For which the other bravely fought.
ANT. These rites
Pluto demands for all.
CR. Not that the base
Be honour'd like the good.
ANT. But in the realms
Beneath who knows if pious this be deem'd?
CR. A foe, though dead, can never be a friend.
ANT. To mutual love, not hate, my nature leads.
CR. If thou must love them, to the shades below
Go now, and love them there; for be assured
No women, while I live, shall bear the sway.
CHOR. Before the gates Ismene now appears,
The tears, expressive of a sister's love,
Fast-streaming from her eyes; and o'er her brows
Sorrow hath spread a gloomy cloud, that dims
The glowing radiance of her beauteous cheeks.

CREON, ANTIGONE, ISMENE, CHORUS.

CR. Thou, like a vapour creeping through my house

L. 544. Omnino legendum εκεινῳ γ' ευσεβει. De Eteocle enim hic agitur, quod ex versu abhinc altero, quo Creontis oratio imperfecta continatur et absolvitur, manifestum est. Mudge.

With wily secrecy to drain my blood,
(For little did I think that two such pests
I nurtured, to subvert my throne combined)
Tell me, with her didst thou prepare this tomb;
Will thou confess it, or abjure the deed?

ISM. I did it, with my sister in the deed
Consorting, and with her partake the blame.

ANT. Juctice allows not this: thou hadst no will
To aid; nor with thee did I share the act.

ISM. Yet in thy danger I am not ashamed
To make myself a partner of thy fate.

ANT. Whose deed this is the dead and Pluto know.
Love shown in words alone contents not me.

ISM. Yet scorn me not, disdain not that I die
With thee, and pay that reverence to the dead.

ANT. Die not with me, nor thine make thou a deed
Thou didst not: it sufficeth that I die.

ISM. Deprived of thee, my sister, how can life
Be dear to me?

ANT. Ask Creon: thy regard
Is paid to him.

ISM. Why dost thou give me grief,
Bringing no good?

ANT. If I deride thee, know
That anguish rends my heart.

ISM. What can I do
That will avail thee now?

ANT. Preserve thyself:
I envy not thy safety.

ISM. Wretched me,
And fail to share thy fate!

ANT. It was thy choice
To live, but mine to die.

ISM. But not unwarn'd

By my prophetic words.

ANT. Thou thought'st them wise;
To me my judgment prompted other thoughts.

ISM. Yet have we equal share in this offence.

ANT. Despond not; thou may'st live: my life long since
I gave, to pay this honour to the dead.

CR. Frenzy hath seized these virgins; lately one
It struck, the other from her early years.

ISM. Not in the wretched doth the mind, O king,
Retain its vigour; crush'd with ills it sinks
Of sense deprived.

CR. Of sense wast thou deprived,
When basely with the base it was thy choice
To suffer.

ISM. Of my sister if bereft,
How can I bear to live?

CR. Speak not of her,
She is no more.

ISM. But wilt thou kill the bride
Affianced to thy son?

CR. Some other bride
He to his bed shall lead.

ISM. But never one
United by such tender ties.

CR. My son
With a base woman I disdain to wed.

ANT. O my belov'd Hæmon, how thy father slights
Thy peace!

CR. Thy bridal bed, and thee alike
My soul detests.

ISM. Wilt thou deprive thy son
Of one so dear?

CR. These nuptials death shall end.

ISM. Her doom, I see, is fix'd, and she must die.

CR. Ay; so must thou, and I. No more delays;
Guards, bear them hence. These women must no more
Be left to range at large; for e'en the bold
Will fly, when death approaching near they see.

CHORUS.

STRO. 1. How blest their state, whose gladsome hours
Glide smoothly on, untaught to taste of woe!
But when (heav'n-sent) sfflictions flow,
Wide-wasting the impetuous torrent pours;
The house from its foundations shakes,
And ruin all its sons o'ertakes.
As when from Thrace the winds tempestuous sweep
With dark'ning horror o'er the deep,
The boiling sands are from the bottom torn,
And high the surging billows borne;
Furious they lash the solid shore,
The promontories round rebellow to the roar.

ANTIS. 1. The house of Labdacus of old
In all the pomp of regal splendor stood;
Till rough misfortune's swelling flood
Ruin on former ruin deep'ning roll'd.
Some god adds fury to its force,
And urges its resistless course;
No dams, no mounds the raging torrent stay,
Race after race it sweeps away.
O the last branch of this imperial line
A brighter sun now seem'd to shine;
The bloody dust the dead heap'd round, [ground.
Proud speech, and frenzy wild soon mow her to the

L. 639. Three causes are here mentioned as concurring to destroy Antigone, the respect shown by her to the bloody corse of Polynices, her petulant answers to Creon, and the madness of her design: these, to give the tragic

STRO. 2. Shall man's presumptuous pride control
Thy pow'r, O sovereign ruler of the skies?
Enfeebling sleep ne'er closed thy eyes:
The months of gods of toil unconscious roll;
And time, that leads old age along
Withering the vigour of the strong,
Beholds thee, glorious in immortal might,
High-throned in heav'n's resplendent light.
But this firm law, ordain'd through ages past,
Is now, and will for ever last;
No state to mortals shall remain
From wasting ills secure, and sorrow's sickly train.

ANTIS. 2. Yet Hope oft waves her wanton wings
And flattering dreams of distant joy inspires;
Oft o'er man's gay and light desires
The dreary gloom of blank illusion flings;
Forward with eager pace he goes;
He hath no sense of latent woes,
Till on the treacherous fires he treads aghast.
Well said the Sage in ages past,
Ills they misdeem as good, whose darkling mind
The god to misery hath assigned;
Heedless awhile through life they stray,
But ruin couches close to spring upon its prey.

See Hæmon comes, the youngest of thy sons,
Oppress'd with sorrow for the virgin's fate,
And grieving of his bride to be deprived.

CR. We soon shall know more certain than the Seers.

style its elevation, are represented as three persons cutting down this last branch of the imperial stem.

Vid. Valckanaer. in Eurip. Phœniss.

668. This seems to be a proverbial expression denoting knowledge more certain than the auguries of the Seers. It finely marks the character of Creon, and prepares us for the scene between the tyrant and Tiresias.

HÆMON, CREON, CHORUS.

CR. Hearing the sentence we have firmly pass'd
On her that should have been thy bride, my son,
Enraged against thy father art thou come,
Or doing this am I still dear to thee?

HÆM. My father, I am thine: be thou my guide
Where honour calls; to follow shall be mine.
With me no nuptials ever shall be deem'd
Of higher import than thy just commands.

CR. Thus it behoves thee from thy heart, my son,
A father more than all things to revere.
This is the pride, the glory of a man,
To train obedient children in his house,
Prompt on his enemies t' avenge his wrongs,
And with the father's zeal in honour high
To hold his friends. But he, who nurtures sons
That in the hour of trial from his aid
Shrink spiritless and weak, hath to himself
Engender'd grief, and slaughter to his foes.
Then do not for a woman now, my son,
Debase thy noble mind; be not a slave
To pleasure: cold is the embrace of her
Who shares thy nuptial bed, if baseness taint
Her mind; no ulcer rankles with such rage
As a false friend. Cast then this virgin off
As one of hostile thought, and let her wed
Some other in the dreary realms below.
For since of all the city her alone
The laws contemning I have clearly found,
My faith, my honour to the state is pledged,
And she shall die. To Jove, who guards the rights
Of kindred lineage let her make appeal:
If those, whom nature hath allied to me,
In deeds unseemly I protect, like claim

They, who are strangers to my blood, might urge
With added reason. For in private life
Whoever to the honour of his house
Is faithful found, that man will be approved
Just to the state: but he, who scorns, or dares
To violate the laws, or forms a thought
To lord it o'er his rulers, shall from me
No praise obtain. He, whom the state appoints
Its sovereign, should in all things be obey'd,
Their justice, their injustice, or their weight
Unquestion'd. In that man, who promptly pays
Obedience to his Chief, would I confide,
Assured that he with honour will command,
Or be commanded; in the storm of war
Assured that he his station will maintain,
A brave associate. Than wild Anarchy
There is no greater ill: beneath its rage
Cities are sunk, and houses are o'erturn'd;
And in the contest of the spear it breaks
The battle's bleeding ranks; whilst Order saves
Those who obey command: by those that rule
This with firm hand should always be sustain'd,
And never for a woman be o'erturn'd.
Better, if we must fall, to fall by men,
And not beneath a woman's spirit sink.

CHOR. We judge, if not by age of sense bereft,
What thou hast said, with wisdom thou hast said.

HÆM. Reason, my father, by the gods is giv'n
To men, the noblest treasure we can boast.
That without reason thou hast framed thy speech
I can not say, I know not how to say,
This with more grace some other may pronounce.
Me nature bids with deep attention mark
Respecting thee how each may speak, how act,

How blame in words that would offend thy ears.
Thy presence on the people strikes an awe;
Their secret murmurs it is mine to hear;
For Thebes laments this virgin, as her fate
Of all her sex the least deserving, doom'd
Most wretchedly for glorious deeds to die:
" That she her brother's corse, in battle slain,
" Disdains to leave unburied, to be torn
" By hungry dogs and ravenous beasts of prey,
" Deserves she not for this the brightest meed
" Of golden honour?" Such the general voice,
Which in dark murmurs whispers discontent.
The world hath not a treasure which I prize
High as thy prosperous honours; to a son
There is no ornament to grace his name
Bright as his father's glory; and on him
Again th' illustrious son fresh glory beams.
Far be this temper from thy mind, to think
What thou may'st say, and nothing else, is right.
Whoe'er imagines prudence all his own,
Or deems that he hath pow'rs to speak and judge,
Such as none other hath, when they are known
They are found shallow. There are many things
Which e'en the wise without disgrace may learn,
And yield convinc'd. Beneath the wintry storms
Thou seest the trees, that bend their heads, preserve
Their branching honours; those which boldly dare
The tyrannous blasts, uprooted fall and die.
The pilot thus, who proudly swells his sails
With vigour unrelax'd, o'ersets his bark,
Then on the shatter'd planks at random floats.
Abate thy anger then, and let thy thoughts
Yield to cool reason: if my younger years
Have aught of judgment, I esteem that man

Of most exalted merit, whose large mind
Contains all knowledge: but since nature deigns
This ample grace to few, from those who speak
And counsel well our glory is to learn.

CHOR. If well what prudence dictates he hath urged,
Thee it behoves, O king, to hear: and thou
To him attend. The words of both are wise.

CR. Shall I then, at my age shall I be taught
Wisdom by him, by one so green in years?

HÆM. Nothing that is not just: though few my years,
Not what my age, but what is right regard.

CR. Is it then just to favour those, who dare
To disobey?

HÆM. To those, whose deeds are ill,
I wish no favour.

CR. Hath not she been found
Deep-tainted with this ill?

HÆM. Not such the voice
Of Thebes through all its state.

CR. Shall then the state
Prescribe to me my laws?

HÆM. These are the words
Of inexperienced youth.

CR. Who then, but I,
Hath right to rule the state?

HÆM. That is no state,
Where one man lords it with despotic sway.

CR. Is not the king lord of the state?

HÆM. Alone
Thus o'er a desert kingdom might'st thou reign.

CR. Mark him; he pleads a woman's cause.

HÆM. If thou
A woman art: for thee my zeal is warm.

CR. Thou basest of mankind, wilt thou oppose

Thy father's will?

HÆM. I see my father err
Wide from the laws of justice.

CR. Do I err
Strengthening my sovereign pow'r?

HÆM. That gains no strength
From insult to the gods.

CR. Degenerate mind,
Beneath a woman's sunk!

HÆM. To baseness sunk
Me never shalt thou see.

CR. For her thy tongue
Now argues.

HÆM. And for thee, and for myself,
And for th' infernal gods.

CR. She shall not live
To be thy bride.

HÆM. And if she dies, alone
She shall not die.

CR. What, is thy daring pride
Ris'n to this height, to threats?

HÆM. What threats, to plead
Against a rash decree?

CR. Of wisdom void
Thou shalt be taught by sorrow to be wise.

HÆM. I will not say my father is unwise.

CR. Thou woman's slave, forbear; urge me no more.

HÆM. Is it thy will to speak, and nothing hear?

CR. It is. But by the heights of heav'n I swear,
Thou shalt not in thy insults long rejoice.
Bring forth that hated wretch; before his face
Now in her bridegroom's presence let her die.

HÆM. Not in my presence: no; before my face
She shall not die; admit not such a thought;

Nor shalt thou ever see my face again.
Associate with thy friends, and spend thy rage
'Mongst those, who tamely will thy frenzy bear.

CREON, CHORUS.

CHOR. In rage with hurried step the youth is gone:
To deeds of fierceness grief such spirits works.
CR. Let him then go, and dare beyond his might:
These virgins from their doom he shall not save.
CHOR. Is it thy purpose then that both should die?
CR. No; not the guiltless. I approve thy words.
CHOR. What death to the offender is decreed?
CR. Deep in a yawning cave beneath a rock
From human footsteps far removed, alive
I will enclose her, and a little food
Only allow, that no unhallow'd stain
Pollute the state. There to th' infernal king,
Of all the gods whom she reveres alone,
Pouring her vows she haply will obtain
That she die not; or rather learn at length
How little reverence to the dead avails.

CHORUS.

STRO. O Love, resistless in thy might,
Triumphant o'er the pow'r of gold,
In youth's soft cheek with beauty bright
Joying thy sweet domain to hold,
Thou rulest o'er th' extended main,
The rural hut, the pastoral plain;
Thy pow'r th' immortal gods obey,
And mortal men confess thy sway:
But all, who feel thy piercing darts,
Feel madness rankling in their hearts.
ANTIS. By thee the virtuous mind beguil'd

Basely to wrong is drawn aside;
By thee contentions fierce and wild
Raise storms in hearts by blood allied.
Desire, in flames now seen to rise
Caught from the virgin's radiant eyes,
Disdains the curb of Laws to own,
But with them shares their potent throne;
While Venus, sovereign of the soul,
Victorious smiles, and scorns control.

E'en I at this sad sight beyond due bounds
Am carried, and the fountain of my tears
No longer can restrain, whilst I behold
Antigone thus borne to share the bed
Of death, the common bed where all repose.

ANTIGONE, CHORUS.

ANT. Ye reverend men, inhabitants of Thebes,
My country, you behold me treading now
For the last time these paths, the sun's bright beams
For the last time beholding, never more:
For me the all-composing hand of death
Leads to the dismal banks of Acheron;
No nuptial rites, no hymeneal song
Are mine; to Achéron a bride I go.

CHOR. Therefore illustrious and with praise obtain'd
Wilt thou go down to the dark cave of death.
Not wasted by the pains of slow disease,
Nor by the sword cut off, dost thou descend,
But, as none other, by thine own free choice,
And living, to the monarch of the dead.

ANT. Thus on the heights of Sipylus of old
The Phrygian stranger miserably died,
Daughter of Tantalus; the rigid rock,

Like ivy wreath'd around her, and subdued
Her vital pow'rs. Her, melting into dews
Fast-trickling, (such the voice of fame) e'en now
The currents fail not, but the gushing tears
Stream from her eyes, and down the mountain flow.
A doom like hers hath fate to me assign'd.

CHOR. She was divine, and sprung from race divine;
But we are mortal, and of mortals born.
For thee how glorious then to share like fate
With those of heav'nly race, and as the gods
Revered, like them to live, like them to die!

ANT. Nay, do not mock me; by my country's gods
Insult me not ere I am sunk in death,
While yet I stand before your eyes. O Thebes,
And you, the splendid habitants of Thebes
With various treasures rich! Ye sacred founts
Of Dirce, and thou grove of Thebes, whose glades
Are open to the frequent-rolling cars!
You all can witness for me, how by friends
Unwept, and by what laws I go condemn'd
To the rude prison of the hollow rock,
Of this unwonted tomb. Unhappy me,
I have, or in my life, or in my death,
No dwelling with the living, or the dead!

CHOR. Thy daring was extreme, and thy offence
'Gainst the high throne of justice. O my child,
O'er thee some trespass of thy father hangs!

ANT. Oh, thou hast touch'd the griefs that rend my heart
With sharpest pangs, my father's mournful fate
Through the wide world divulged, and all the ills
Which sunk th' illustrious house of Labdacus!
Ye horrors of my mother's nuptial rites,
My father in unhappy hour ye led
To the same couch from which he took his birth;

And thence, O miserable me, I sprung!
With them accursed, unwedded, I descend
To share their gloomy mansions. Fatal too
Thy nuptials; O my brother: thou, though dead,
Draw'st me, yet living, to the realms below.

CHOR. To act with piety denotes a soul
Touch'd with religious awe: but the high pow'r
Of those invested with the sovereign rule
May never be transgress'd. Indignant pride,
Fix'd to its purpose, hath thy ruin wrought.

ANT. No pitying tear, no friend, no nuptial rites
Are mine, as thus unhappy I am led
This destined way. No more shall I behold
The sacred orb of yon bright-beaming sun;
Yet not one friend laments or weeps my fate.

CREON, ANTIGONE, CHORUS.

CR. If mournful cries and wailings before death
Avail'd, there is not one, be well assured,
That e'er would cease them. Instant take her hence,
Enclose her in the rock's sepulchral cave,
As I commanded, leave her there alone,
Either to die, or there to live entomb'd.
We from her death receive no stain: but she
No more shall with the living converse hold.

ANT. O thou dark tomb, thou rugged bridal bed,
Deep mansion, which shalt ever close me round,
To thee I go; I go to join my friends,
A numerous train, whom sunk among the dead
Hath Proserpine received. I go the last
And most unhappy, ere th' allotted space
Of life I reach. Yet glowing at my heart
I feed this hope, that to my father dear,
And dear to thee, my mother, dear to thee,

My brother, I shall go; since with these hands
Your bodies I with cleansing lavers wash'd,
Added each ritual ornament, and pour'd
Libations at your tombs. And now thy corse,
Loved Polynices, in the earth I laid;
And for the pious deed have this reward;
Yet those of better judgment will approve
My care, which paid these honours to the dead.
Where I a mother now, were I a wife,
Mouldering in death if child or husband lay,
I would not, if the state opposed the deed,
In such a task engage. Ask you what rules
Direct my conduct? If an husband dies,
Another might be wedded; to a child,
One lost, another father might give birth:
But when both parents in the earth are laid
Entomb'd, a brother can no more be born.
Me, by these thoughts impell'd with hallow'd rites
To honour thee, my brother, Creon deem'd
Deep-stain'd with guilt, and daring heinous deeds;
He seized me, with rude hands he leads me now
Of nuptial rites, of hymeneal song,
Of bridal bed deprived, and the sweet joys
A mother in her children's nurture knows;
But thus oppress'd with wretchedness, by friends
Abandon'd, to the caves of death I go
Alive. What rites, what honours of the gods
Have I transgress'd? But why, unhappy me,
Why to the gods look more? What heav'nly pow'r
Shall I invoke, since for my pious deeds
I bear the vengeance to the impious due?
If this the justice of the gods demands,
And I offend, these sufferings I forgive:
If these offend, no greater ill be theirs

Than they to me unjustly have assign'd.

CHOR. The tempest of her passions yet is high;
The same impetuous spirit rules her yet.

CR. For this the slaves that lead her shall be taught
With tears their slow obedience to repent.

ANT. Death from that menace is not distant far.

CR. I will not sooth thee with the flattering hope
That thy fix'd doom shall ever be reversed.

ANT. Thou city of my fathers, royal Thebes,
And you, who from my country drew your birth,
Ye gods, I hence am forced; I am no more!
And you, who o'er the Theban state preside,
See the last virgin of an honour'd line,
Your kings; see what I suffer, and from whom,
See me condemn'd for pious deeds to die!

CHORUS.

STRO. 1. Thus the beauteous Danae lay
Long doom'd in brass-girt walls to dwell,
Denied the sun's ethereal ray
Enclosed in her sepulchral cell:
Yet her rich illustrious blood
From a long line of Argive monarchs flow'd;
And she, unconscious of his secret love,
Cherish'd the golden gems of Jove.
O fate, resistless is thy pow'r,
Triumphant o'er the heav'n-descended show'r,

L. 993. This timid and servile Chorus had not the spirit even to intercede for the generous Antigone; and now she is led to death, instead of pitying her unhappy fate, they poorly put us off with cold unintersting narrative. The story of Danae is well known. After the birth of Perseus, she and her infant son were enclosed in a chest, and thrown into the sea. The poet here alludes to this, as well as to the tower of brass. The story of Lycurgus is also well known: his punishment is differently related; Sophocles here represents him as thrown into a dungeon.

The rampired wall, war's furious train,
And the black bark that rides the roaring main!

ANTIS. 1. Thus the Thracian king, whose pride
Dash'd the scorn'd Thyrsus to the ground,
And dared th' avenging god deride,
In chains of rigid rock lay bound:
Sunk his soul to deep dismay,
His fury melted by degrees away;
Now knew he that his rude unhallow'd pride,
By frenzy fired, a god defied;
For he severe with stern disdain
From their loved Orgies awed the raptured train,
Forbade the Bacchic torch to shine,
And scorn'd the tuneful Muses' song divine.

STRO. 2. Nigh the clashing rocks, whose brow
Frowns o'er the double sea that roars
Foaming with angry waves below,
You saw, ye wild Bosphorean shores,
Thracian Salmydessus saw
(Where Mars the neighbouring cities holds in awe)
The sons of Phineus, and the wound abhorr'd;
You saw their darken'd eye-balls gor'd;
Nor sword, nor spear, nor dart was found,
Unhappy youths, to give the wound:

L. 1017. These clashing rocks, the Symplegades or Cyaneæ Petræ, are mentioned by Euripides. See his Medea, l. 2. n. and Iphigen. in Taur. l. 487.

How did they pass the dangerous rocks
Clashing with rude, tremendous shocks?

L. 1023. Phineus married Cleopatra, the daughter of Boreas and Orithyiæ, by whom he had two sons, Crambis and Orythus. He afterwards repudiated her, and married Idæa, the daughter of a Thracian king. This barbarious stepmother put out the eyes of Crambis and Orythus; Cleopatra, to escape her cruelty, concealed herself amidst the rocks, where she died. To this circumstance the Chorus alludes. See Natal. Com.

See where the savage stepdame stands,
The pointed shuttle arms her bloody hands.

ANTIS. 2. Wasting in their dreary cel
(The hope of nuptial joys no more)
With woe and darkness doom'd to dwell,
Their mother's miseries they deplore;
Yet her pure and noble blood
Rich from the high-born Erecthidæ flow'd;
And where the rock its winding caverns forms,
Nurtured amidst her father's storms,
Swift as the courser's rapid flight
The virgin bounded o'er the mountain's height:
But fate with aged step and slow
O'ertook her speed, and chain'd her down to woe.

TIRESIAS, CREON, CHORUS.

TIR. Ye rulers of the Theban state, we come
As is our wont, both seeing with the eyes
Of one: the blind some leading hand require.

CR. Aged Tiresias, what of import high
Hath now arisen?

TIR. That I will impart:
And thou obey the Seer.

CR. Did I e'er slight
The wisdom of thy mind?

TIR. The realms of Thebes
Through dangers therefore safely hast thou steer'd.

CR. To thy sage counsels much indeed I owe.

TIR. Be counsell'd now: fate hangs upon this hour.

CR. What may this be? I tremble at thy words.

TIR. Hear what my skill hath mark'd, and thou wilt know
Placed on my ancient seat of augury,
Whence all my auspices I draw, the voice
Of birds I hear; unknown the sound; their screams

Were wild and strange, of ill presage; and fierce
With bloody talons each the other rent.
I knew this; for the clashing of their wings
Gave not dark signs: I trembled, and explored
The hallow'd fires that on the altars burn.
But from the sacrifice no flame shone bright,
Nor vapour from the humid flesh arose;
It wasted on the ashes, and roll'd low
A dull black smoke, exsuding on the fire;
The entrails swell'd and burst; the melting thighs,
Shrunk from th' involving crawls, lay bare. These signs
Of dark and dangerous import from my boy
I learn'd; to me he shows them, and my voice
Explains to others. From thy harsh resolves
These omens threat the state; the birds of prey,
And dogs, whose ravenous hunger hath devour'd
The hapless Polynices slain in war,
Pollute our public altars: for this cause
Our pray'rs, our victims the offended gods
Accept no more; no hallow'd flames ascend;
No more are heard th' auspicious notes of birds
Gorged now with human flesh. Weigh these things well,
My son; to all of mortal race to err
Is common; but that man is not unblest,
Nor unadvised, who having err'd, and felt
The ill awaiting error, heals the wound,
Nor perseveres unmoved: th' obdurate mind
Pays dear for its perverseness. To the slain
Be then appeased: why woud'st thou wound a corse?
A brave man wars not with the dead. With thought
To thee benevolent I well advise.
Most pleasant is instruction when it comes,
And with it comes advantage, from the wise.

CR. I am your mark, old man; and all your shafts

At me are aim'd: nor are the prophet's arts
'Gainst me unpractised: by this venal race
I as a slave am sold, and led away.
Pursue your traffic; be the precious ore
Of Sardis, and the Indian gold, your gain;
Him in the earth you never shall entomb.
No; would the eagles of almighty Jove
Bear to their sovereign's throne his mangled flesh,
I would not, dreading that pollution, yield
To lay him in the tomb; for well I know
That mortals never can pollute the gods.
Yet there are men, thou aged Seer, held high
For various excellence, who basely fall,
By sordid lucre when allured they speak
The words of baseness urged in honour's style.

TIR. Is there a man that knows, is there a man
That comprehends.....

CR. What wou'dst thou? To us all
Is this address'd?

TIR. With what high excellence
Wisdom transcends all treasures?

CR. This he knows,
Who knows that folly is our greatest bane.

TIR. Heavy on thee hangs that disease.

CR. Reproach
I would not harshly on the Seer retort.

TIR. Thou dost reproach me, when thou say'st my voice
Announces falsehoods.

CR. You are fond of gold,
All the prophetic tribe.

TIR. The tyrant loves
Treasures by baseness gain'd.

CR. Know'st thou thy words
Are to a king address'd?

TIR. I know it well;
For o'er a kingdom saved by me thy reign
Thou holdest.
CR. As a Seer I deem thee wise,
But as a man unjust.
TIR. The dark decrees
Of fate, which in my breast I would have kept
Conceal'd thou wilt compel me to disclose.
CR. Disclose them then, but not through hopes of gain.
TIR. Respecting thee I have no hope of gain.
CR. But know, my purpose never shall be sold.
TIR. And know thou well that ere the rapid wheels
Of the sun's chariot many circles roll,
One sprung from thee, thy offspring, thou shalt pay
Dead for the dead a recompense, for those
Whom from the light of life to the dark realms
Thou hast sent down dishonour'd, and entomb'd
In the rock's dreary cavern; and for those
Whom of the honours to the gods below,
Of solemn obsequies, and hallow'd rites
Thou hast deprived; a deed, that nor to thee
Belongs, nor to the gods above; a deed
Of tyrant force: the slow-avenging pow'rs,
The Furies of th' infernal gods, for this
In ambush wait to seize thee, and in ills
Like these will plunge thee. Go now, see if gold
Hath bribed the prophet's mercenary voice:
Pass a few moments, the laments of men,
The shrieks of women through thy house shall sound.
Indignant all the hostile states are roused,
Whose mangled dead the dogs or beasts of prey
Have in these plains polluted, or the birds
Of obscene wing, bearing th' unhallow'd stench

E'en to the sacred altars of the gods.
These are the shafts (for thou hast moved my soul
To anger) which at thee I aim: their force
Strikes deep, nor shalt thou shun the burning wound.
Boy, lead me hence; and let him vent his rage
On those of fresher years; or curb his tongue
With modesty, and learn to train his mind
To gentler thoughts than those which now it bears.

CREON, CHORUS.

CHOR. The Seer is gone, O king, and hath foretold
Things dreadful: never from my earliest youth
To these grey hairs now scatter'd o'er my head,
Knew I his voice prophetic to the state
Aught false, or faithless in th' event pronounce.
CR. I know it; and distraction rends my mind.
To yield, would wound me deep; but to oppose,
With keener agonies would pierce my soul.
CHOR. Son of Menœceus, prudence is required.
CR. What must I do? Thy counsel shall prevail.
CHOR. Go, from the rock's dark cave the virgin raise,
And for the outcast dead erect a tomb.
CR. Dost thou approve this? Wou'dst thou that I yield?
CHOR. And instantly, O king: malignant minds
The vengeance of the gods with speed o'ertakes.
CR. My heart reluctant yields to thy advice;
But with Necessity we may not strive.
CHOR. Go thou, nor others with this charge entrust.
CR. Instant I go. You, my attendants, haste,
With axes in your hands haste to the plain,
And I (since now my sentence is reversed)
Who bound her, will in person set her free.
I fear that to preserve the ancient laws

Through all his life is man's discreetest part.

* CHORUS.

STRO. 1. O thou by various names renown'd,
The Theban Nymph's illustrious grace,
Sprung from enraptur'd Jove's embrace,
While all his awful thunders roll'd around;
Who joy'st thy richest gifts to pour
O'er blest Italia's favour'd shore,
And on the hallow'd Eleusinian plain
Where Ceres waves her ripen'd gold,
With her thy mystic reign dost hold;
God of the shouting Thyad train,
Pleased o'er the walls, which thy loved Thebes enclose,
A present guardian to preside,
Where deep Ismenus rolls his tide,
'Midst the fierce race that from the dragon rose!

ANTIS. 1. Thee saw the wild and rocky steep,
Whose forked summits proudly rise,
And stretch their rude brows to the skies,
Where the Corycian Nymphs their orgies keep:
Thee, the flames blazing on the mount:
Thee, pure Castalia's sacred fount:
Thee, the Nysæan mountain's craggy sides,

* The Chorus, no longer awed by the presence of the tyrant, or intimidated by his threats, assume the dignity and sacredness of their character; and in this religious Ode, which is truly a tragic hymn in the original acceptation of the word, invoke the protection of Bacchus, the tutelary god of Thebes.

L. 1184. This mention of Italy has a peculiar propriety, as the Tuscans were religious observers of the rites of Bacchus.

L. 1197. Euripides also mentions this fire sacred to Bacchus near one of the summits of Parnassus,

ἔνθα πῦρ πηδᾷ Διὸς
Βακχεῖον. Ion. v. 1125.

O'er which the mantling ivy twines:
The swelling hillocks green with vines,
Whose purple fruit their foliage hides;
And waking harmony's enchanting pow'rs,
On thee attends thy raptur'd train,
Raises the high immortal strain,
And hails thee guardian of the Theban tow'rs.

STRO. 2. The Theban tow'rs their rampires rear,
Thy guardian care their boast, their pride;
They to thy mother too were dear,
Who in the flaming thunder died.
Now, while her banners Discord waves,
While through our streets Confusion raves,
Prompt to avert our threaten'd woe
Haste from the steep Parnassian brow,
Or from Eubœa's groaning shore,
And to thy Thebans peace restore!

ANTIS. 2. Thou leader of the starry train
That flaming bursts upon the sight;
Director of th' harmonious strain
Whose sweet notes charm the ear of night;
Hear, son of Jove, O Bacchus, hear,
Bright in thy form divine appear;
Thy frentic Nymphs from Naxos lead,
The frolic dance who lightly tread,
And, as around their god they stand,
Hail thee the leader of their band!

MESSENGER, CHORUS.

MESS. Inhabitants of Thebes, the honour'd seat

l. 1217. This alludes to the flaming torches, which Bacchus and his female attendants carried in their nocturnal orgies. So Euripides, Bacchæ, l. 153.

But Bacchus, waving in his hand
The torch that from his hallow'd wand
Flames high, his roving Bacchæ leads.

Of Cadmus and Amphion, such the life
Of man, so unassured his fickle state,
I cannot prize it high, nor would dispraise:
For fortune ever raises or casts down
The happy, and th' unhappy, at her will,
And no man can divine the fates to come.
Such was the state of Creon, it from me
Excited admiration; from its foes
He saved this land, o'er all its realms obtain'd
The monarchy, reign'd sole with sovereign pow'r,
And flourish'd in a noble race of sons.
Now all is lost: for when the joys of life
Man knows no more, may he be said to live?
He breathes, but hath not life. Nay, let his house
Be stored with riches, let a monarch's pomp
Attend him; yet 'midst these if heart-felt joy
Be absent, all the rest I would not prize,
Nor purchase with the shadow e'en of smoke.

CHOR. What ills, that cause the royal house to mourn,
Comest thou to tell us?

MESS. They are dead: those live
Who caused their death.

CHOR. Inform us whose this deed,
Who lies in death?

MESS. Hæmon is dead; he lies
Welt'ring in blood.

CHOR. Slain by his father's hand,
Or by his own?

MESS. By his own hand he died,
Against his father for the virgin's death

L. 1250. Mr. Heath judiciously observes that the word *αὐτόχιρ* here, and in some other places, signifies simply interfectus. Vid. supra v. 56. 178. In Ajace v. 852. Æschylum in Septam ad Thebas v. 810. Had other critics adverted to this, they would have spared their censures here.

Enraged.

CHOR. What truths, O Seer, thy voice announced!

MESS. These are fulfill'd: yet others claim our thought.

CHOR. But see Eurydice, th' unhappy wife
Of Creon: these sad tidings she hath heard,
Or chance hath brought her from the royal house.

EURYDICE, MESSENGER, CHORUS.

EURY. Ye citizens of Thebes, I heard the voice
Of rumour, as I came forth, at the shrine
Of Pallas suppliant to address my vows:
The bars, that closed the gates, it chanced my hand
Was opening, at that instant the report
Of ill my house affecting reach'd my ear.
With terror struck in my attendants' arms
I sunk, and life forsook my fainting frame.
But tell me all; repeat the mournful tale;
In woes not unexperienced I shall hear.

MESS. My honour'd Mistress, I will tell thee all,
(For I was present) nor conceal the truth.
Why should I flatter, when a little time
Would show my falsehood? Truth is always plain.
I to the summit of the field thy lord
Attended, where exposed and torn by dogs
The wretched corse of Polynices lay:
Him (our vows first to Proserpine address'd
And Pluto, that propitious now their wrath
They would avert) in hallow'd lavers cleansed
On a green pyre of new-pluck'd boughs we laid,
And burn'd the mangled relics; then raised high
The earth contiguous, a sepulchral mound.
Thence to the virgin's cavern'd rock we go,
The nuptial couch of Death; when of our train
One heard the distant sounds of loud laments,

Which echoed round that bridal bed of Death
With obsequies unhonour'd: to his lord
He bears the tidings. As the king approach'd,
The hollow murmurs of a voice resound;
Deeply he sigh'd, and spoke these mournful words,
" Are then my fears prophetic? Do I tread,
" Unhappy me, a path that leads to woe
" The most afflicting? Moaning to my ear
" Comes my son's voice. You, that attend me, go,
" Haste to the cavern, from its mouth remove
" The rock's obstructing mass; stand near, observe
" If Hæmon's voice I hear, or by the gods
" I am deceived." Obeying these commands,
Utter'd in deep despair, we went, we look'd,
And in the cave's extreme recess beheld
The virgin strangled; round her neck the zone,
Which bound her flowing robes, her hands had twined.
She lay, and near her lay the youth, his arms
Clasp'd round her, mourning the unhappy fate
Of his lost bride, his father's ruthless deeds,
And all his nuptial joys thus sunk in woe.
When Creon saw him, with a mournful groan
He enter'd, and lamenting thus exclaim'd,
" O my unhappy son, what dost thou here?
" What is thy purpose? What calamity
" Hath sunk thee thus? Come from this cave, my son,
" Suppliant thy father begs thee." His wild eyes
The youth roll'd fiercely round, and gave strong proof
Of stern disdain and hate; nor made reply,
But drew his pointed sword: his father's flight
The stroke prevented; then th' unhappy youth
Turning his rage against himself, while yet
His arm was raised, in his own side plunged deep
The furious weapon, and, retaining yet

His sense, around the virgin threw his arms
Yet warm, and there expired, with his last breath
Distaining her pale cheeks with drops of blood.
Dead with the dead he lies, and in the house
Of Pluto celebrates his nuptial rites;
A melancholy proof that rash designs
Bring the severest miseries on man.

MESSENGER, CHORUS.

CHOR. Canst thou conjecture what this means? The queen
Is gone, and not a word burst from her lips.

MESS. I am astonish'd; but my hopes are warm
That dignity of mind from public view
Restrains her grief for her son's fate: retired
Amidst her female train she may indulge
Her sighs and streaming tears: from rash attempts
Her prudence oft experienced is her guard.

CHOR. I know not: but a silence so reserved
Imports some dread event; such are my thoughts:
A clamorous sorrow wastes itself in sound.

MESS. Let us draw near the house; we soon shall know
If fatal purpose in her troubled mind
Secret she harbours: wise is thy remark;
Silence oppresses with too great a weight.

CHOR. But see, the king advances, in his hands
Bearing the signal token of his woes.
Not from another, might I freely speak,
But from himself arose this fatal ill.

CREON, CHORUS.

CR. Alas the frenzies of a wayward mind
Ill-judging, rigorous! See their deathful fruits,
The dead to those who slew them how allied!
These are my unblest counsels! O my son,

My son! Untimely is thy fate, cut off
In youth's fresh prime: yet thou wast blameless; all
The fatal rashness, all the guilt is mine.

CHOR. At length, O king, thou seest what justice is.

CR. Too late I learn it now; then, then the god
Laid on my head this load, impell'd me then
To these rough paths, and all our high raised joys
Spurn'd to the ground. Oh vain, vain toils of men!

ATTENDANT, CREON, CHORUS.

ATT. My royal lord, what dreadful ills are thine!
There in thy hands thou bearest; in thy house
Others await thee: thou wilt see them soon.

CR. Is their aught worse? Is there aught else of ill?

ATT. Thy queen, the mother of this breathless youth,
Gored with fresh wounds, unhappy, is no more.

CR. O thou polluted port of death, why thus,
Why thus dost thou destroy me? What ill sounds,
Ah me, of dreadful utterance hast thou sent!

CHOR. Thou hast brought death to one already dead.

CR. What say'st thou? This is new: and death on death
Is heap'd. My wife a bleeding victim slain!

ATT. Thou may'st behold her, to the private scenes
Allotted to the females not removed.

CR. Wretch that I am, another ill I see,
A second ill: and me, unhappy me
What fate yet waits? Before me lies my son
Late slain, and there another new in death;
Unhappy mother, and unhappy son!

ATT. Beside the altar by a sudden wound
She fell, and closed her eyes in endless night;
But first lamented the illustrious cave

L. 1354. The joys arising from the defeat of the Argives.

Of Megareus, her son first lost; then mourn'd
The fate of Hæmon; and with solemn grief
Bewail'd thy cruel deeds which slew thy sons.

CR. Chill horrow shakes my frame. O wretch, wretch, wretch!
Will no kind hand plunge deep th' avenging sword,
Deep in my breast, and end an hated life
Conflicting 'midst inextricable woe?

ATT. Amidst her anguish with her dying breath
She charged thee with the death of both her sons.

CR. How did her hand inflict this deadly wound!

ATT. Soon as she heard her son's lamented death,
In her sad heart she plunged the fatal sword.

CR. Not on another can this fault be charged;
No; it is all my own; the deed was mine;
I, O my son, I slew thee! Lead me hence,
Far hence with speed oh lead me, for I now
Am nothing; no; I have no being now.

CHOR. Well hast thou judged, if aught in ills be well.
Calamities, when present to the view,
Though slight, with keenest anguish pierce the sense.

CR. Advance, advance, appear thou last and best
Of all my fortunes; bring my final day;
Haste, that another day I ne'er may see!

ATT. These things are future, leave them to the gods.
But what is present how must we dispose?

CR. But what I warmly wish I made my pray'r.

ATT. Make now no wish, no pray'r: to mortal man
There is no refuge from his destined woe.

CR. Take hence this lifeless shadow. O my son,
I slew thee, but I purposed not thy death!
Thee too, my wife, I slew. Unhappy me!

L. 1378. Euripides gives this son of Creon and Eurydice the name of Menœceus. His generous spirit and death make a fine episode in the tragedy of the Phœnician Virgins.

Ah, which way shall I turn? where rest my thoughts?
All is distraction, all is ruin: fate
Bursts on my head, resistless in its force.

CHOR. To happiness the best, the surest guide
Is wisdom: but irreverence to the gods
Becomes not mortal man; the mighty vaunts
Of pride, with mighty punishments repaid,
Teach his old age thus humbled to be wise.

THE

TRACHINIAN VIRGINS.

PERSONS OF THE DRAMA.

DEIANIRA

HYLLUS

LICHAS

HERCULES

ATTENDANTS

CHORUS of Trachinian Virgins.

THE

TRACHINIAN VIRGINS.

Sophocles is said to have drawn his women such as they ought to be. Deianira is a bright example of conjugal affection; the unhappiness of her situation, working upon the tender sensibility of her mind, diffuses a soft and gentle melancholy around her; one ray of joy shines through this gloom of sorrow, but it is only a transient beam, which leaves her involved in darker shades. In the most trying circumstance that can affect the heart of a woman she feels the injury, and complains of it in secret to her female friends, but without any violence of resentment, without any intemperate asperity; to recover the wandering love of Hercules is her only solicitude; the unhappy measure, which she takes to effect this innocent purpose, brings on the dreadful catastrophe of the drama. As this measure could not with propriety have been carried into execution without the approbation, at least without the assent of the Chorus, and as the

cautious prudence of old age could not have approved it, the Poet with great judgment formed the Chorus of young and unexperienced Virgins.

The delineation of Hercules in so terrible a state required the utmost skill of Sophocles; he has managed it with wonderful propriety: the hero could not be represented either as amiable or virtuous; Hercules was yet a mortal man; but that such a man, "with all his imperfections on his head," should after his decease be enrolled among the gods, is a proof of the wretched state of religion and morality in that age; that those divine honours were continued shows how little the most enlightened ages of Greece had advanced in real knowledge.

The great art of the poet in this drama is shown in the gradations of distress, from the first plaintive melancholy of Deianira to the last agonies of Hercules, wrought up with that chaste simplicity which always distinguishes real genius. To feel this in its full force we need only read the Hercules Œtæus of Seneca; all there is "the very "torrent, tempest, and whirlwind of unmeaning "passion;" it is a tale told by an ideot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.

The scene is before the royal palace at Trachin, a town situated near Mount Œta. Ceyx was then its king.

THE

TRACHINIAN VIRGINS.

L. 13

DEIANIRA, FEMALE ATTENDANT.

DEIA. Of old this saying hath 'mongst men been famed,
That of man's life, till death hath closed the scene
We know not to decide, to term it blest,
Or wretched. Of my life I can decide,
Ere to the regions of the dead I go;
I know it to misfortune doom'd, and grief.
E'en with my father Œneus when I dwelt
At Pleuron, much I suffer'd through the dread,
More than Ætolian virgin ever felt,
Of hated nuptials; for the River came
My wooer, Achelöus; in three forms
Me of my father he demanded; now
He walk'd a Bull, a Dragon now he roll'd

L. 8. Strabo speaks of Pleuron as in ancient times one of the greatest ornaments of Greece. It was the residence of the kings of Ætolia.

L. 13. The classical reader will recollect instances enough of rivers thus described, and needs not to be informed of the reasons of this poetic imagery. The ingenious author of the History of the Heavens assigns a very different

His spotted wreaths, now wore the human form
With a Bull's head disfigured, copious streams
Of fountain water flowing down his cheeks
With hair thick-shaded. Dreading to receive
A wooer so abhorr'd, my constant wish
Was death, to such a bridal bed preferr'd.
At length, though late, th' illustrious son of Jove
And of Alcmena came, to me what joy!
He with the monster in fierce fight engaged,
And set me free: his dangerous toils distinct
I cannot tell thee, for I know them not;
Whoe'er unterrified beheld that sight,
Let him relate it; all my sense was lost
In fear, lest sorrows fatal to my peace
My beauty should perchance produce. At length
The arbiter of battles, sovereign Jove,
Disposed th' event to glory and to joy,
If joy: for wedded now to Hercules,
My much-loved hero, fear succeeding fear
Anxious for his dear sake I still sustain;

cause. The inhabitants of Memphis, he says, ended their harvest about the time when the Sun enters the Bull; that animal therefore became the symbol of harvest and plenty in that distinguished province: and they gave the Nile the head of a Bull, to shew that he was the father of the harvests of Ægypt; and this is the reason why other rivers are described under the same form; for though they do not overflow, like the Nile, yet they never fail to fertilize the plains through which they wind their course. Histoire du Ciel poetique.

L. 22. Strabo tells us that the Achelöus often overflowed its banks, and rendered the boundaries between Ætolia and Acarnania disputable, which had been the cause of many battles. He then, from this passage of Sophocles, speaks of the combat between Hercules and Achelöus; and adds that those, who search for truth through poetic fables, say that Hercules restrained these inundations by strong embankments, and by cutting channels drained great part of the Parachelois; from the first work the poets represent him as rending off an horn of the Bull; from the fertility, which the second work produced, they formed the fable of the Horn of Amalthea. Strabo. lib. x.

For the night brings him to me, and the night
Drives him away to toil that follows toil.
I bore him children; these he seldom sees;
As one that hath acquired far distant fields,
Which only when he sows and when he reaps
He visits; such the life, that brings my lord
Back to his house, and ever sends him thence
On some harsh service: now, these toils achieved,
I thence feel greater fears; for since he slew
The mighty Iphitus, at Trachin here
Exiled we dwell, with hospitable rites
Received; but whither he is gone none knows;
But he is gone, with pangs of piercing grief
Rending my heart, for I have cause to fear
That evil hath befall'n him; no short time,
But ten slow months have roll'd away, and five
Added to these, yet absent he remains,
Nor have I tidings of him; there must be
Some dreadful ill; at his departure such
The writing he left with me; to the gods
My earnest supplications oft I pour
That no affliction thence may be derived.

ATT. My mistress, Deianira, I long time
Have seen thy sorrows and thy frequent tears,
Mourning the absence of thy lord: and now
If by a slave's advice the nobly born
May be admonish'd; me if it becomes
So to presume; whence is it that with sons
Thus blest, not one of them is sent to seek
Thy lord; and Hyllus chief, whom most the charge
Beseems, if aught his father's welfare moves
His anxious care? And see, with manly step
He to the house advances: if my words
Deserve attention, thou hast now the pow'r
To give th' important mandate to the youth.

HYLLUS, DEIANIRA, ATTENDANT.

DEIA. My child, my son, the meanly born may give
Generous advice: this woman, though a slave,
Hath spoken what denotes a liberal mind.
HYLL. Inform me what, if I may be inform'd.
DEIA. Thy father absent in a distant land
So long, she deems it shame that search by thee
What region thus detains him is not made.
HYLL. If credence to report be due, I know.
DEIA. Where doth fame say, my son, that he resides?
HYLL. All the past year in sordid tasks employ'd,
And by a Lydian woman held a slave.
DEIA. If he bore this, what more may we not hear?
HYLL. It is reported he hath burst those bonds.
DEIA. Living or dead where is he said to be?
HYLL. In arms, and in Eubœa, 'gainst the state
Of Eurytus advanced, or on his march.
DEIA. Know'st thou th' unerring prophecies, my son,
That land respecting, which he left with me?
HYLL. What are they? Never have they reach'd my ear.
DEIA. That there his life will end; or, conquest there
Obtain'd, his future days shall all be bright,
Without one cloud of adverse fortune more.
And wilt not thou, my son, whilst now his fate
Hangs doubtful, fly to aid him? For with him
We share one fortune; in his fall we fall,
And in his safety we our safety find.
HYLL. Mother, I go: had this prophetic voice
Been earlier known to me, I had long since
Been present to his aid; now, thus inform'd,
These things attentive I will trace, nor cease
Till all the truth I know: but the success,
My father's arms accustom'd to attend,
Forbids dismay, and all excess of fear.

DEIA. Go then, my son; good fortune, though late known,
Brings a warm welcome to the anxious mind.

CHORUS.

STRO. 1. O thou, whom saphir-spangled Night
(That vanquish'd flies before thy golden ray)
Calls forth thy orient lustre to display,
And curtains close thy setting light,
To thee, O Sun, I call; declare,
Bright blazing through the lucid air,
Where dwells the hero through this length of time?
Where does Alcmena's son reside?
Rolls he on ocean's billowy tide?
Lies he reposed in some soft eastern clime,
Or where decline thy west'ring rays?
Oh say, for all thy piercing eye surveys!

ANTIS. 1. Desire, and doubt, and anxious fear
Incessant harrow Deianira's breast;
Like the poor bird that wails her widow'd nest,
As from her eye still streams the tear,
Mindful she mourns her lord, each thought
With terrors at his wand'rings fraught,
And at imagined dangers melts away:
As on her lonely couch she lies,
The sleepless night she wastes in sighs,
And sinks to sorrow and despair a prey;
Whilst to her fancy ills unknown
In all their hideous threat'ning shapes are shown.

STRO. 2. As when with terror we behold
From South or North the wild winds sweep,
Waves after waves with fury roll'd
Swell the vex'd bosom of the deep;
Such is the Theban Hero's state,
Tost in the ceaseless storms of fate.

Toils rise on toils, an endless train,
As billows on the troubled main;
Yet to his virtues just some god
Saves him from Pluto's drear abode.

ANTIS. 2. Let me then blame thy anxious fear;
Far other views if I display,
My words bring comfort to thy ear:
Thou shou'dst not throw sweet Hope away.
The sovereign ruler of our fate
Gives mortals no untroubled state;
But joy and grief are ever found
Revolving their alternate round,
As circling in the Arctic skies
The constellations set and rise.

EPOD. Nor Night in sable stole array'd
O'er mortals always spreads her solemn shade;
Nor always griefs remain,
Nor riches; their light wings at once they spread,
Away at once are fled;
The heart now welcomes joy's bright train,
Now sickens at th' approach of pain.
Then sink not, Queen, with griefs opprest,
But let hope brighten in thy breast;
Jove o'er his sons his care extends,
And all his glorious race defends.

DEIA. Inform'd, I ween, of my afflictions thou
Art present here: what anguish rends my heart
May'st thou ne'er know by suffering; thou as yet
Art inexperienc'd. Youth at random roves
O'er its own flow'ry fields; nor scorching heat
Nor show'r annoys it, nor the noxious force
Of boisterous winds; in pleasures it supports
A life that knows not trouble, till the name
Of virgin now is lost in that of wife:

Then first she shares anxiety; the night
Then for her husband bids her wake to fears,
Or for her children; then she may be taught
By her own feelings what th' oppressive woe
That weighs me down. My tears have often flow'd
For many sufferings; but my present grief
Springs from such cause as never rose before;
This I will tell thee. When my royal lord
On his last emprize issued from his house,
He left with me a writing of old date,
His mandates, which before when marching forth
To many contests he forbore to show,
But went as to o'ercome, and not to die.
But now, as to return no more, he gave
In charge what portion for my nuptial dow'r
I should receive, and to his sons assign'd
To each his share of his paternal land:
Nay, he the time determined; from these realms
Beyond the complete year three waining moons
Should he be absent, then the fates require
That he must die; the dangers of that time
Should he surmount, then all his future life
Will pass unshaded with affliction's cloud;
To all the toils of Hercules, he said,
Such is the period by the gods assign'd;
Thus at Dodona the prophetic Doves

L. 193. This oracle at Dodona was of the highest antiquity, and celebrated for its truth. Herodotus was informed by its priestesses that two black doves, flying from Thebes in Ægypt, rested on this beech, and in an human voice declared that an oracle of Jupiter must be fixed there. He supposes that some Phœnician rovers had brought two priestesses from Thebes: the colour of the doves, and the rites observed in consulting the oracle, show them to be Ægyptian. The name of one of these holy women is said to be Peristera, which in the Greek language signifies a dove: this among so fanciful a people was foundation enough for the fable.

Gave from their ancient beech the voice of fate.
These truths are certain, and the present time
Gives dreadful expectation of th' event;
So that, loved virgins, from sweet sleep I start,
Distracted with my fears lest I remain
Now of the noblest of mankind bereaved.

CHOR. Be thy words now of happier import; see
A messenger arrives; his laurel wreath
Gives token that his tidings are of joy.

ATTENDANT, DEIANIRA, CHORUS.

ATT. My royal Mistress, I am come the first
To bear thee tidings, which from all thy fears
Will set thee free: know then Alcides lives,
And is victorious; to his country's gods
He brings the consecrated spoils of war.

DEIA. What dost thou tell me? What import thy words?

ATT. To thy warm wish thy husband in his house
Will soon appear with his victorious force.

DEIA. This information from the citizens
Received, or from some stranger, dost thou bring?

ATT. The herald Lichas in the verdant mead
These things announces loud. I heard, and ran
The first to greet thee with these words of joy,
To win thy favour, and obtain some boon.

DEIA. Why comes he not, of triumphs if he speaks?

ATT. That is not easy, Lady; all her sons
Melia pours forth, who eager to inquire
Throng close around him, and retard his steps;
Impatient each the welcome news to learn,
Till all his ardent wish be gratified,
Suffers him not to pass; hence his delay,

L. 219. Melia was a town of Thessaly near Trachin.

To him unpleasing, grateful to the croud:
But soon thou may'st expect to see him here.

DEIA. O Jove, adored on the uncultured mead
Of Œta, thou, though tedious the delay,
Hast giv'n us joy. Ye virgins, who abide
Beneath this royal roof, and you who tread
With me this court, raise high th' enraptured voice
Of gratulation; for beyond my hopes
On me a ray of orient brightness beams.

STRO. In the chaste and secret shrine
Raise the loud and festive strain,
Thou, for whom the virgin train
Bids the nuptial torches shine.
Let the spritely youths around
Catch the sweet entrancing sound,
And to the golden-quiver'd king,
To Phœbus, Pæans, joyful Pæans sing.

ANTIS. Virgins rise, the raptures share;
To Ortygian Dian high
Swell the voice of harmony:
Hers the double torch to bear;
Hers the flying hind to chase
'Midst the Nymphs of mountain-race:
I rise sublime; without controul
Thou reign'st, sweet Pipe, the monarch of my soul.

EPOD. The Thyrsus round with ivy twin'd
To raptured frenzy swells my mind;
I long to join the Bacchic train:
Evoe! Raise th' extatic strain.
Now bid farewell, loved queen, to woe:
See, in pure streams thy joys begin to flow.

L. 244. As Hecate, bearing a torch in each hand.

L. 248. This breathes the same spirit of poetical enthusiasm as Pindar's ἀναξιφόρμιγγες ὕμνοι. Olymp. Ode 2.

DEIA. I see, loved virgins, yes, my watchful eye,
Not faithless to its office, sees this train.

LICHAS, DEIANIRA, CHORUS.

DEIA. Herald, to joy I welcome thee, though late
Be thy arrival, if thou bring'st me joy.
LICH. With joy we greet thee, lady, and with joy
Are greeted; such the meed our acts deserve.
The hero, that with glory hath achieved
His enterprize, the voice of welcome earns.
DEIA. Thou art most welcome. First, what most I wish,
Tell me, alive shall I receive my lord?
LICH. I left him in sound health, alive, and high
In vigorous strength, with no disease oppress'd.
DEIA. Where? In his native, or a foreign land?
LICH. On the Euboic strand, where he prepares
Altars and offerings to Cenæan Jove.
DEIA. A vow? or by some oracle required?
LICH. A vow, when his victorious spear laid waste
The country of these women, whom thou seest.
DEIA. Who, by the gods, and whence are these? If right
I judge of misery, wretched is their state.
LICH. These, when the town of Eurytus he razed,
He for himself selected, and the gods.
DEIA. Advanced against this town was he engaged
In tedious war all this vast length of time?
LICH. No: but in Lydia he was long detain'd
Not free, such his account, but sold a slave.
We should not censure, Lady, what appears
Wrought by the hand of Jove. Betray'd, and sold
To the barbaric Omphale, he pass'd
One tedious year a slave: but the disgrace

L. 269. So called from Cenæum, a promontory of Eubœa, where an altar was erected to him.

So stung his noble soul, that with an oath
He vow'd the author of this wrong, his wife,
And children should be slaves; nor vow'd in vain;
But, expiation made, with social hosts
Vengeful he march'd against the rampired walls
Of Eurytus, for him of all mankind
Alone he deem'd the cause of his disgrace,
Who, to his hearth when he approach'd, a friend
With hospitable rites received of old,
Insulted him aloud with taunting words,
And all the outrage of an hostile mind;
Reviling him as holding in his hands
Arrows by fate assign'd to reach the mark,
But that his sons excell'd him in the skill
To draw the bow; that by the nobly born
He as a slave should be trod down and crush'd;
Nay more, with wine when heated from his house
He spurn'd him forth. Indignant at these wrongs,
O'er the Tirynthian hills when Iphitus
Search'd for his steeds that from their pastures roved,
His eye on other objects bent, his mind
On other thoughts engag'd, he hurl'd the youth
From the steep summit of the tow'ring rock.
Offended at the deed Olympian Jove,
The supreme king and father, sent him thence
To slavery sold, nor brook'd a treacherous act
Unpractised but against this hapless youth:
With manly fortitude and front to front

L. 289. Hercules removed from Tirynthia to Trachin in voluntary banishment for the murder of Iphitus; but his active spirit could not rest there; he went further, and, as Lichas tells the story, was sold as a slave to Omphale for a year, that being the usual time of atonement for murder; the year being elapsed, and expiation made, he now advanced to execute his vengeance on Eurytus.

In arms had he opposed him, heav'n's high king
Had pardon'd him, and deem'd his vengeance just;
But base insidious wrong the gods abhor.
But all those boasters, whose reviling tongues
Were wanton in their insolence, have now
Their mansions in the gloomy realms beneath,
And their proud city is enslaved. These dames,
Which here thou seest, from high and happy life
Sunk to this wretched state attend thy will.
Such are thy lord's commands, which I perform
With faithful zeal. When to his father Jove
The hallow'd victims for his conquest vow'd
Are slain, expect him here: of my long speech,
Though grateful all, this gives thee highest joy.

CHOR. Now, royal lady, certain joy is thine;
This captive train gives proof of his report.

DEIA. Yes, my heart feels it; I have cause, just cause
Of joy; it bounds to hear my lord returns
Victorious; all within me is alive
To tender sympathy. Yet those, who deep
Resolve the change of fortune, must have fears
Lest he, who triumphs now, may some time know
A sad reverse. E'en now, my friends, my heart
Feels the warm touch of pity, while I see
These wretched females from their country torn,
Torn from their parents, in a foreign land
To exile doom'd; yet these perhaps are sprung
From generous lineage, but must now sustain
A servile life. O Jove, whose guardian pow'r
Averts misfortune, never may I see
My offspring by thy anger thus assail'd;
Or if to sufferings thou hast doom'd them, spare
My anguish, nor inflict them whilst I live!
Such are my fears, these females as I view.

But who amidst this youthful train art thou?
Ill chance is thine: unmarried is thy state?
Or dost thou feel a mother's grief? Thy mein
Denotes thee virgin, and of noble blood.
Who is this stranger, Lichas? Whence her birth?
Tell me: my pity most for her is mov'd,
For she alone shows fortitude of mind.

LICH. What can I know? Why ask of me? Perchance
She may from no ignoble race be sprung.

DEIA. Is she from Eurytus of royal birth?

LICH. I know not; nor minute inquiry made.

DEIA. From her associates heard'st thou not her name?

LICH. No: for in silence I my charge perform'd.

DEIA. Speak then unhappy virgin; let thy voice
Inform me; for I feel a soft concern,
And painful not to know thee who thou art.

LICH. She will not speak; nor hath she to this hour
Unlock'd her lips, or ever utter'd word;
But obstinate in silence mourns her weight
Of misery, always weeping since she left
Her desolated country: her ill fate
Moves thee to pity and to pardon her.

DEIA. Then let her be indulged, and in the house
Find courteous treatment: to her present ills
I would not that from me fresh grief, her griefs
Augmenting, she receive; she hath enough
Of woe already. To our houses now
Let us all go; where thy occasions call,
Go thou; domestic duties claim my care.

DEIANIRA, ATTENDANT, CHORUS.

ATT. Stay yet a little, that from these apart
Thou may'st be shown what persons to thy house
Thou hast admitted. Truths, of which no part

Thou yet hast heard, and which behoves thee hear,
I know, and can with faithful zeal impart.

DEIA. What wou'dst thou say? Why thus detain me?

ATT. Stay,
And hear me: not before did I abuse
Thy ear with false reports; nor shall I now.

DEIA. Those, late departed hence, should I recal,
Or to these virgins wou'dst thou speak, and me.

ATT. To thee and these I speak without restraint;
But let those go.

DEIA. Well, they are gone; now speak.

ATT. Nothing of what this herald lately said
Accorded with the laws of honest truth;
But now he utters falsehoods, or before
Dared to deceive the ear with false reports.

DEIA. What say'st thou? Plainly tell me all thy thought:
Thy words are dark; I understand them not.

ATT. I heard this man, and many present heard
His words, declare that for this virgin's sake
This war 'gainst Eurytus Alcides made,
And the high-tower'd Œchalia. Love alone
Of all the gods incited him to arms;
And not his Lydian slavery, and base tasks
By Omphale commanded, nor the death
Of Iphitus hurl'd headlong from the rock.
This love conceal'd, the herald other pleas
Devised. But when his lord had urged in vain
The sire to give the daughter to his bed
In secret nuptials, he assign'd some cause
Of slight and trivial charge to march in arms
Against her country, where the royal throne
Was held by Eurytus; he slew the king
Her father, and his wasted city razed.
Her, as thou seest, returning he now sends

Thus, lady, not without peculiar care,
Not as a slave; admit not such an hope;
It is not to be thought, since love inflames
His soul. By duty prompted I to thee
What was my chance to learn from him disclose:
And this, not I alone, but many heard;
For 'midst the conflux of Trachinians round
Assembled he declared it; and to these
I make appeal. Unwelcome to thy ear
If what I tell thee, I have no delight
In speaking it, but what I speak is truth.

DEIA. Unhappy me, what snares enclose me round!
Ah, what a secret pest have I received
Beneath my roof! This wretch then hath no name,
So he that led her swore, with all these charms,
This beauteous form, and dignity of mien!

ATT. From Eurytus she drew her royal birth,
And Iole her name; yet of her race
He could not speak, he no inquiries made.

CHOR. Ruin to all the base I would not wish;
But perish he, who forms the vile design
With dark and treacherous baseness to betray.

DEIA. How, virgins, should I act? For at this tale
In wild amazement all my sense is lost.

CHOR. Go, make inquiries of the man, add threats
Of torture, soon he will confess the truth.

DEIA. I go: to thy advice my mind accords.

CHOR. Should we wait thee here? or what thy will?

DEIA. Stay here: for see, the man, uncall'd by me.
Of his own will advances from the house.

DEIANIRA, LICHAS, ATTENDANT, CHORUS.

LICH. What wou'dst thou, Lady, that I bear in charge
To Hercules? I hasten my return.

DEIA. After so long an absence why so soon
Depart, ere my inquiries I renew?
LICH. More wou'dst thou ask? I to inform thee stay.
DEIA. But wilt thou answer me with honest truth?
LICH. To what I know; be witness mighty Jove!
DEIA. Who is this woman, hither whom thou led'st?
LICH. A native of Eubœa; of what race
I know not.
ATT. Herald, fix thine eye on me.
Know'st thou to whom thou speak'st?
LICH. With what intent
That question dost thou ask?
ATT. If thou dost bear
The spirit of a man, be bold, and speak.
LICH. To Deianira, to the queen I speak,
Daughter of Œneus, wife of Hercules,
My royal mistress; or I see in vain.
ATT. This was my wish to know. Didst thou not say
She is thy royal mistress?
LICH. With just right.
ATT. Tell me what punishment is then thy due.
If to thy mistress thou art found not just?
LICH. And how not just? With what insidious wiles
Wou'dst thou ensnare me?
ATT. Fear not wiles from me;
Thy thoughts are all employ'd on wiles.
LICH. I go,
Unwise thus far to hear thee.
ATT. Hence thy foot
Thou shalt not stir till, one short question ask'd,
I have thy answer.
LICH. Ask whate'er thou wilt;
Thy tongue, it seems, can speak.
ATT. This captive then,

Whom thou hast brought, who is she? dost thou know?

LICH. Who is she?——Why is this inquiry made?

ATT. Hast thou not said that she, on whom thine eye
Look'd as on one unknown, was nobly born
Of Eurytus, and Iole her name?

LICH. To whom said this? Whom bring'st thou to attest
That from my lips such words he ever heard?

ATT. The citizens: for the Trachinians round
In crouds assembled heard thee speak these words.

LICH. I said indeed I heard this; but to speak
On mere imagination, and to affirm
As certain, merit not a like regard.

ATT. Imagination! Didst thou not on oath
Declare thou brought'st the wife of Hercules?

LICH. I say she was his wife! Now, by the gods,
Who, honour'd lady, is this stranger here?

ATT. One, who in person heard thee say his arms
Subdued the country for this virgin's sake:
That not his Lydian slavery, but the love
Of her spread devastation o'er her realms.

LICH. The man is frentic: Lady, send him hence:
With such to hold vain converse is not wise.

DEIA. By Jove, who rolls his thunders through the grove
That shades the brow of Œta, do not hide
The truth: to no base woman wilt thou speak,
Nor to an untaught mind that hath not mark'd
Man's nature, form'd not always to delight
In what once pleases. He, 'gainst Love who stands
In daring opposition, is unwise.
Love at his pleasure lords it o'er the gods,
O'er me too; why not o'er another then
E'en such as I? Should I then blame my lord
As vanquish'd by this pow'r; or should I blame
This woman, who to me causes no ill,

Nor brings dishonour, I were mad indeed.
It is not so. But if by him thy mind
To falsehood hath been train'd, no honest lore
Hast thou been taught: if from thyself thou draw'st
This glozing science, when thy heart shall prompt
To open faith, distrust with jealous eye
Will look on thee as base: let then thy tongue
Always speak truth: on the free man, who bears
The hateful brand of falsehood, shame attends.
Can'st thou escape detection? Vain that hope:
What thou to many hast divulged, to me
Some will disclose. If thou hast fears, those fears
Are vain and causeless: not to be inform'd,
Aye, that indeed would grieve me; but to know,
Can that be dreadful? Hath not Hercules
Admitted others to his nuptial bed,
And many? Yet not one of those e'er heard
Harsh word from me, or keen reproach; nor now
Shall this Eubœan, though with love she melt
His yielding heart. Her, most of all the train,
Soon as I saw, I pitied: well I know
Her beauty hath undone her; cruel fate,
And not her will, hath on her country brought
Ruin and slavery. Of these things no more;
I give them to the winds. But mark thou well
My charge, on others practise thy deceits,
But always let thy tongue speak truth to me.

CHOR. This is for thine advantage; be advised:
The time will come when thou wilt not repent
So doing; my esteem too thou wilt gain.

LICH. My honour'd mistress, since I see thee moved
By soft humanity, and not unlearn'd
In human nature, I no more will hide
Aught from thy knowledge, but disclose the truth.

It is as this man said; with love of her
Was Hercules inflamed; and for her sake
Her father's realm, Œchalia, by the spear
Was wasted wide. These things (for of my lord
Thus I must speak) he gave me not in charge
To hide, nor were they by himself disown'd:
This fault was mine, if it be deem'd a fault;
For I was fearful, lady, lest thy breast
By tidings so unwelcome I should wound.
And now, since all the truth to thee is known,
For his sake, for thine own, with kindness treat
This woman; be thy promised courtesy
Confirm'd; for he, who glorious in his might
Triumph'd o'er all, is by her love subdued.

DEIA. Such is my purpose; no augmented load
Of ills spontaneous on myself to draw,
Contending with the gods. Retire we now
Beneath this royal roof, thou shalt receive
My mandates; for his presents in return
I shall send presents; these too thou shalt bear;
Not to send something by thee were unjust,
Who camest attended with a splendid train.

CHORUS.

STRO. Sovereign, resistless in her sway
O'er the charm'd heart victorious Venus reigns.
Not her sweet force, which Gods obey,
Which Jove's firm soul subdued, attunes these strains;
Which taught the gloomy Pow'r to bow,
The monarch of the realms below;
And him, who gives his thundering waves to roar,
And furious shake the solid shore.
To other themes these humbler strains belong:
The warring rivals claim the song,

In arms contending for this bride,
The contest dust, and toil, and wounds decide.
ANTIS. Rising in all his strength the Flood,
In form a Bull terrific to the sight,
Ætolian Achelous stood,
With horns his threat'ning forehead arm'd for fight.
From Thebes the Chief of mighty fame
Fierce to the rough encounter came,
The son of Jove; his massy club he rears,
His bow unbent, his arrows bears.
Inflamed with jealous love and rival rage
In horrid combat they engage;
While Venus with severe delight
Awards the prize, and arbitrates the fight.
EPOD. Dauntless each the fight provokes,
Loud the thunder of their strokes;
The clanging bow now aims the wound;
With dreadful clash the Bull's strong horns resound.
Now front meets front, the furious blow
With horrid conflict threatens death;
Now in strong grasp each struggling foe
Strains every nerve, and lab'ring pants for breath.
Meanwhile the beauteous Nymph, whose charms
Inflamed the combatants to arms,
Anxious and doubtful of her fate
Conspicuous on the river's margin sate;
(My song records the voice of fame)
All was suspence and awful dread,
Till victor now the hero came,
And from her mother's arms the trembling virgin led.

DEIANIRA, CHORUS.

DEIA. Whilst with these female captives in the house
My guest, on his departure bent with speed,

Holds converse, unobserved to you, my friends,
Hither I come, to tell you what device
These hands have form'd, and for my sufferings raise
Your sympathetic pity; for no more
A virgin deem I that I here received,
But one who shares his bed; as in his bark
The mariner admits a baneful freight.
And now the same embrace in the same couch
We both await: such is the recompense
The good and faithful Hercules, so call'd,
Repays me for my long and anxious care.
Yet my heart knows not anger that he yields
Oft to this weakness: but to live with her
In the same house, with her my nuptial bed
To share, what woman can bear this? I see
Her age, it daily opens to fresh bloom,
While mine is in the sere: the eye of man
Delighted views the vernal glow, and loves
To crop the flow'r; but from the fading leaf
Turns with disgust away: hence rise my fears
Lest Hercules, in vain my husband call'd,
Give to her younger beauties all his love.
Yet not for this doth anger, as I said,
Become a prudent woman. But, my friends,
What I possess of pow'r to heal my griefs
I will inform you. In a brazen vase
A present from the ancient Centaur long
Have I preserv'd; while yet in youth's fresh bloom
This from the shaggy Nessus I received
When dying from his wound It was is wont
O'er the deep flood Evenus rolls to bear
For hire, who wish'd to reach the further bank,
In his strong arms; nor dashing oar was his,
Nor barge with swelling sails. Me thus he bore,

When, unattended with my father's train
I followed Hercules; but when he reach'd
The middle of the stream, his wanton hands
'Gainst modesty transgress'd; I cried aloud:
The son of Jove sprung forward, in his hand
His ready bow, from which a feather'd shaft
Wing'd with impetuous fury pierced his side.
Me then the dying monster thus address'd,
Daughter of aged Œneus, I no more
Shall pass this flood; but since my arms have borne
Thee their last charge, derive thou thence this good,
Observant of my words: Preserve with care
The clodded blood which issues from my wound;
The gore of the Lernæan Hydra tinged
The blacken'd shaft; this will have pow'r to charm
The heart of Hercules to thee assured;
That never woman shall his eyes behold
Fair and attractive of his love, like thee.
To memory this recalling (for with care
The dying Centaur's gift I have preserved)
With it, my friends, this vestment I have tinged,
Nothing omitted which he gave in charge
While yet he lived. These things are now prepared.
The boldness of ill arts I would not know,
I would not learn; those women I abhor
Who dare attempt them: yet her youthful bloom
Could I by charms o'ercome, and sooth the heart
Of Hercules to love, I would assay
Their potency: but if you deem th' attempt
Unmeet, or void of force, I will forbear.

CHOR. If thou hast aught of confidence in deeds
Like this, we judge that thou hast purposed well.

DEIA. My confidence is only such as gives
Strength to opinion, not assured by proof.

CHOR. Then put it to the proof; opinion else,
Though built on reason, no assurance yields.
DEIA. We soon shall know, for Lichas from the gate
I see advance; he quickly will be here.
Only be secret; for e'en shameful things
In dark concealment are secured from shame.

LICHAS, DEIANIRA, CHORUS.

LICH. Daughter of Œneus, give me thy commands;
Too long already I have linger'd here.
DEIA. Lichas, in this my care hath been employ'd,
Whilst converse with the strangers thou hast held,
That thou may'st bear this beauteous-woven vest,
Wrought by my hands, a present to thy lord.
This give him, with a charge that but himself
No mortal in it proudly be array'd;
Nor ever let the sun's resplendent beam
Behold it, nor the altar's sacred flame,
Nor the bright-blazing hearth, till he shall stand
In public view, and show it to the gods,
When on some solemn day the victim bleeds:
For such my vow, if e'er I saw or heard
That he return'd in safety, with this robe
To deck his person, that before the gods
Gorgeous in new attire he might appear,
And offer sacrifice. Bear this, in proof
I gave such charge; my signet he will know.
Now go, and take good heed not to presume
Beyond thy orders; so shalt thou obtain
A double meed, my favour and thy lord's.
LICH. The duty of an herald it is mine
With firmness to discharge; nor e'er to thee
Will I be false; but, as it is, present
This chest, and faithfully relate thy words,

DEIA. Go then: the state of my domestic charge
Thou know'st.

LICH. I know it, Lady, and shall say
That all things by thy prudent care are safe.

DEIA. Thou know'st, for thou hast seen, how I received
This stranger, with what friendly courtesy.

LICH. I saw it, and my heart was rapt with joy.

DEIA. Is there aught else I wish thee to relate?
My love to him, I fear, thou may'st report,
Ere of his love to me I am assured.

CHORUS.

STRO. 1. You, on the cliffs, whose jutting brow
O'erhangs the dashing wave,
At whose soft foot the warm springs flow
The weary limbs to lave;
On Œta's summits rudely piled
Who fix your habitations wild;
You, who the Melian bay command,
The golden-quiver'd Virgin's strand,
Or near the rocky straits reside
Where Greece her Chiefs in council views with pride;

ANTIS. 1. Soon shall you hear the pipe's sweet sound;
To you it comes again;
No mournful notes it breathes around
But sprightly is the strain:
And, with such airs as joy inspire,
Rivals the Muses' heav'nly lyre,
The winged hours the hero bring,
Son of Alcmena and heav'n's king;
He comes, he chases all our fears,
And the rich spoils of every virtue bears.

L. 717. The straits of Thermopylæ, where the great Amphictyonic council met.

STRO. 2. The hero absent from our state
Twelve tedious moons we mourn,
Whilst anxious Expectation sate,
And watch'd his wish'd return,
Unknown what seas he ploughs with pain,
What shores his lingering steps detain.
Meanwhile his fond wife melts in tears,
And yields her heart a prey to fears:
But Mars now bids his fury cease,
And closes his long day of toils in peace.

ANTIS. 2. May he arrive, e'en now arrive
Nor let the lab'ring oar
Forbear his welcome bark to drive
On Trachin's shouting shore,
But bring him from the island shrine,
Where now he offers rites divine.
Yes, let him come with all the fire
Of eager love and fond desire;
Come, as the Centaur's words profest,
Wrapt in persuasion's medicated vest!

DEIANIRA, CHORUS.

DEIA. I fear, my female friends, that I have done
More than became me in my late attempt.
CHOR. Daughter of royal Œneus, what hath chanced?
DEIA. I know not; but misgivings sink my mind,
Lest it should soon appear that I have done,
Impell'd by honest hope, some mighty ill.
CHOR. Thy presents to thy lord, cause they this fear?
DEIA. So strongly, that I never will advise
A promptness to a deed of dark event.
CHOR. If we may know, inform us whence thy fear.
DEIA. A thing, my friends, hath happen'd far beyond
All thought, and big with wonder. You shall hear.

The soft wool sever'd from the snow-white fleece,
With which I lately ting'd the robe, at once
Wasted and, touch'd by none within the house,
Shrunk self-corroded into dust, and lay
A loose heap on the surface of the stone.
That thou may'st know each circumstance, distinct
Shall my relation be, and giv'n at large.
Whate'er the dying Centaur, 'midst the pangs
Of the keen arrow in his side infix'd,
Gave me in charge, I treasured in my heart,
As characters indelibly engraved
On brazen tablets: his instructions these,
And I obey'd them; from the blazing hearth,
And by the warm beams of the sun untouch'd,
Close-cover'd still to keep this potent charm
Fresh, till occasion should require its use.
I did so: and when now my thought resolved
To put its virtue to the proof, retired
In secret, wool from my domestic stores
I for the purpose took, and tinged the vest;
Then folded it, and laid it, as you saw,
In a close chest by the sun's beams untouch'd.
Again returning I beheld a sight
No language can express, nor could the thought
Of man conceive; the wool, wherewith I tinged
The vest, I chanced to throw where the sun's rays
Beam'd in full force; as it grew warm, it shrunk
And wasted on the ground, like the light dust
Which falls beneath the saw, like this it lay:
But soon the swelling mass in froth arose,
Fermenting like the grape's rich juice, that drops
Pour'd in grey autumn on the earth. My mind
Is troubled, and perplex'd with fears: I see
That I have done some dreadful deed; for whence

This kindness by the dying Centaur shown,
Or why to me, through whom the savage died?
It is not so; but, wishing to destroy
The author of his wound, he filed his tongue
To sooth my ear with glozing courtesy.
This I too late perceive, for now to know
Avails not: I alone, ah wretched me!
(If with false fears my soul is not deceived)
Have wrought his ruin: well I know the shaft
That gave the wound; e'en Chiron the divine
Fell by its fatal point; to every beast
Its touch is death; and the black poison, mix'd
With the vile Centaur's blood, shall now destroy
My lord too. Such my fears. But should he die,
Fix'd is the purpose of my soul, with him
I too will die: for who could bear to live
With infamy, that has a sense of shame,
And a base nature holds in high disdain?

CHOR. Horror at dreadful deeds must seize the soul;
But ere th' event hope should not be renounced.

DEIA. But in designs, which honour does not own,
There is no hope that harbours confidence.

CHOR. To those who err in judgment, not in will,
Anger is gentle: Lady, such be thine.

DEIA. The stranger to affliction thus may speak;
But not the wretch who shares the dreadful ill.

CHOR. The time now calls for silence; on this theme
Unless thou wou'dst hold converse with thy son,
Who went to seek his father; he is here.

HYLLUS, DEIANIRA, CHORUS.

HYLL. My mother, oh that thou wert now no more;
Or, if alive, that to some other son
Thou wert a mother; or to holier thoughts

The present temper of thy mind were changed.

DEIA. What have I done that merits this rebuke?

HYLL. Know then the dire event: this fatal day
Thy husband and my father thou hast slain.

DEIA. Ah wretched me! What hast thou said, my son?

HYLL. What cannot be recall'd: the deed once done,
Where is the pow'r can render it not done?

DEIA. What may this mean, my son? By whom inform'd
Say'st thou that I have done this hateful deed?

HYLL. I saw my father's suff'rings, with these eyes
I saw them, nor by others was inform'd.

DEIA. Where didst thou see him? where attend him? say.

HYLL. If thou wou'dst know it, I must tell thee all.
The far-famed town of Eurytus destroy'd,
The trophies of his conquest, and the spoils
He to Cenæum brought, a rocky point
High-rising on the Eubœan shore, and wash'd
On each side by the sea; his altars there,
And the green foliage of a grove, he raised
To Jove his father; there my longing eyes
With joy first saw him: but as he prepared
The various victims, hence his servant came,
The herald Lichas, and thy present brought,
The fatal vest: with this, for such thy charge,
He robed himself, and slew twelve beauteous bulls
Selected from the play; but to the god
An hundred various victims he had brought.
At first th' unhappy hero, with a mind
Cheerful and joying in his gorgeous robe,
Offer'd his vows; but when the bloody flame

L. 845. This was usual on solemn occasions. Thus Virgil,

Spargite humum foliis, inducite fontibus umbras,
Pastores: mandat fieri sibi talia Daphnis.

Blazed from the hallow'd sacrifice, and heat
Glow'd from the unctuous firs, close to his sides
And to each limb, as by some artist fix'd,
The robe abhered; and through his bones shot fierce
Convulsive pains; then as the poisonous gore
Of the detested Hydra rankled deep,
He ask'd th' unhappy Lichas, for thy crime
In nothing blamable, by whose base arts
He brought this robe: unconscious what he brought
Th' ill-fated herald said, from thee alone
It was a present to his charge assign'd,
And brought as he received it. At these words,
Rack'd as he was with agonizing pains,
He seized him by the foot above the part
Where the joint bends, and dash'd him 'gainst the rock
Projecting o'er the waves that wash its sides;
A mingled mass of hair, and brains, and blood
Flow'd from his shatter'd head; th' assembled crouds
Lament the hero's sufferings, and the fate
Of Lichas; but of all the train not one
Had courage to approach him: to the ground
One while he bent convulsed; anon erect
He cried aloud; the promontories round,
The rocks of Locris, and Eubœa's heights
Resounded with his cries: but now grown faint,
And oft with anguish writhing on the earth,
With many a groan he cursed thy nuptial bed,
Inhuman as thou art, to his repose
So fatal; cursed thy father's bridal rites,
Whence to his life this pest. Then through the mist,
That darken'd o'er him, his distorted eyes
He rais'd, and saw me 'midst the numerous croud,
Weeping his fate; he look'd on me, and cried
My son, come to me; do not fly my ills,
Though with thy dying father thou shou'dst die;

But bear me hence, and see thou lay me where
No mortal may behold me: if thy soul
Is sensible of pity, from this land
Remove me; haste, that here I may not die.
Thus as he urged, we placed him in a bark,
And brought him to this shore, no easy task,
Roaring aloud through anguish; him thou soon
Or living wilt behold, or lately dead.
This 'gainst my father have thy arts devised,
This hast thou done, my mother; and this deed
May rigorous justice on thy head repay,
And the avenging Fury, if my pray'rs
Be righteous: they are righteous: thou hast cast
All that is righteous from thee, and hast slain
The best, the noblest man the earth could boast:
His equal never more shalt thou behold.

CHOR. Without reply why dost thou haste away?
Silence, be thou assured, confirms the charge.

HYLL. Nay, let her go; and may a favouring gale
Swell as she goes, and waft her from my sight.
Why should I cherish with a son's fond pride
The name of mother? Nothing hath she done
That shows a mother's part: let her then go,
And take this farewell with her, May she find
Such joys as to my father she hath given.

CHORUS.

STRO. 1. See, virgins, see, the doom of old
By the prophetic voice foretold
Advances with impetuous speed,
For thus the fates decreed,
"Twelve times the moon shall bend her silver bow,
"Then rest from toils the son of Jove shall know."
See, th' event with secret force
Onward holds its destin'd course;

For he, who sinks to Pluto's peaceful shore,
Is to toils a slave no more.

ANTIS. 1. For if the Centaur o'er his head
Guileful the sanguine cloud has spread;
If from the venom-tinctured vest
He feels the rankling pest
Of death and of the spotted Hydra born,
How shall he see another orient morn?
Ours the hero to deplore
Wasted by the Hydra's gore,
As the rough Centaur's wiles their pangs impart,
Burning in his tortured heart.

STRO. 2. But as fear her love alarms,
When now the royal dame with dread
Beholds a rival to her nuptial bed,
Confiding in these fatal charms
She thoughtless is ensnared with hostile wiles,
Whilst hope to win her lord her heart beguiles.
Now the ruin she deplores,
Now the tear of anguish pours;
For fate advancing all the treachery shows,
Whence this mighty mischief flows.

ANTIS. 2. Forth hath burst the fount of tears.
The pest is spread. From all my foes
Never on thee, Alcides, fell such woes
To rouse dejected pity's fears.
Alas the illustrious hero's fatal spear,
That flamed terrific in the front of war!
From Œchalia's summit hoar
This the captive virgin bore:
The deed declares Idalia's sportive queen,
Acting silent and unseen.

CHOR. Am I deceived? Or hear I from the house
The voice of lamentation newly raised?

It is the cry of grief distinct and clear :
Something beneath this roof bursts forth anew.
But mark this aged matron, what a gloom
Of more than usual sadness clouds her brow !
She comes, and will inform us what hath chanced.

MATRON, CHORUS.

MAT. Of no light ills, O virgins, hath the gift
Sent to Alcides been to us the cause.
CHOR. Say, aged matron, what new ill is this.
MAT. The last of ways is Deianira gone,
Not by the living trod.
CHOR. The way of death ?
MAT. Thou hast heard all.
CHOR. Alas th' unhappy queen,
Is she then dead ?
MAT. The truth again thou hearest.
CHOR. Ah her untimely fate ! Say how she died.
MAT. Most wretched, by an harsh and rueful act.
CHOR. Tell us the manner.
MAT. She destroy'd herself.
CHOR. By what disease, or what wild frenzy seized ?
MAT. Pierced by the point of the relentless sword.
CHOR. But how could she devise, or how alone
Accomplish on herself the deathful deed ?
MAT. By the deep piercing of the pitiless steel.
CHOR. Did thy sad eyes behold the desperate deed ?
MAT. I saw it all, for near her I was placed.
CHOR. How was it ? how ? inform us.
MAT. Her own hand
The dreadful act against herself perform'd.
CHOR. This Nymph, this fatal stranger hath giv'n birth,
Birth to a Fury dreadful to this house.
MAT. Dreadful indeed ! But more, hadst thou been near,

Hadst thou, as I, been present to behold
Her conduct, more thy pity had been moved.
CHOR. Such things how dared a woman's hand attempt?
MAT. It was a scene of horror: thou with me
Wilt thou attest, when thou shalt know the whole.
Soon as she entering pass'd the gates alone,
And saw her son preparing in the court
A cover'd couch with purpose to return
And meet his father, she conceal'd herself
Where none might see her; then she wail'd aloud
Prostrate before the altar, that her state
Was become desolate; and if she touch'd
Aught which before her hands had used, she wept.
Then through th' apartments as her wand'ring steps
She turn'd, some loved domestic if she saw,
Affected at the sight she pour'd a flood
Of tears; her wretched state she then deplored,
And all the riches of her house, no more
With children to be blest. This had an end.
Then to the chamber, where the nuptial bed
Of Hercules was placed, with sudden speed
I saw her rush; conceal'd a secret eye
I kept on her, and there beheld her spread
With busy care the coverings o'er the couch
Of Hercules; this done, she sprung aloft,
And seated on the middle of the bed
Gave the warm fount of tears to gush, and said,
O thou dear couch, long since my bridal bed,
Henceforth farewell; for never shalt thou more
Receive me on thy soft down to repose.
She spoke, and with dispatchful hand unloosed
The golden clasp, which o'er her swelling breasts
Confined her robe; thus was her side laid bare,
And her left shoulder. With my utmost speed

I ran to tell her son what she design'd.
Short was the interval; yet when we came,
We saw her side deep wounded, to her heart
The sword had pierced: at that sad sight her son
Groan'd in the anguish of his soul, for well
He knew that 'gainst herself enraged this deed
She had effected, taught too late what ill
She on her house had brought, without design,
But by the Centaur's evil arts ensnared.
Nor sighs nor tears th' unhappy youth forbore,
Nor lamentations: to her cheek he join'd
His cheek, and to her bleeding side his side;
Thus lying near her many a groan he heaved,
That rashly he had charged her with a crime
Of base intent; then wept, because at once
Of hers and of his father's life deprived.
Such scenes I saw: so that if mortal man
Of one day, or of more should make account,
His thoughts were vain; to-morrow is not, ere
In safety he has pass'd the present day.

CHORUS.

Which most shall cause my tears to flow?
Which most shall I lament?
Each is a deed of equal woe,
And dreadful each event.
Beneath this roof may one be seen,
The other comes with threat'ning mein.
The present ill, th' impending dread,
Alike their gloomy horrors spread.
Oh, would some fav'ring whirlwind rise,
Sweep from this house, and drive me through the air
From this dire scene of sorrow far,
And from these miseries spare my aching eyes!

Whilst the son of Jove sustains
Fierce and agonizing pains,
My trembling soul would sicken with affright,
And I should die at such a sight.
See, to this royal mansion near
Some prodigy of woe they bear:
No distant grief excites this mournful strain,
Taught like the thrilling Nightingale's to flow.
In solemn silence moves the stranger train,
Heedful, as friends, with gentle steps and slow:
Nor word nor sound he utters as he lies,
And death, or sleep, hath closed the hero's eyes.

HERCULES WITH ATTENDANTS, HYLLUS, CHORUS.

HYLL. What anguish, O my father, rends my heart
To see thee thus! What can I do? Ah me,
Unhappy me, what grief is mine!
ATT. My son
Be silent, lest thou rouse his cruel pangs,
And torture him to madness; thus reposed
He lives; forbear then, and restrain thy cries.
HYLL. Say'st thou he lives, old man?
ATT. His sense thus lock'd
In sleep, thou wilt not rouse him, wilt not move,
Or stir the fury of his fierce disease.
HYLL. His sufferings so immense distract my soul.
HERC. Ah, to what region am I come? O Jove,
'Mongst whom of mortals am I laid, thus rack'd
With never-ceasing pains? Ah wretched me,
How fierce the gnawings of this fell disease!
ATT. Happier had been thy silence: from his eyes
Thy clamours have dispell'd pain-soothing sleep.
HYLL. How could I at a sight like this refrain?

HERC. Ye hallow'd altars, whose firm base is fix'd
On high Cenæum, what a recompense
For all my victims to unhappy me
Have you repaid? O Jove, with what fierce pains
Hast thou afflicted me? This dire disease,
Whose unextinguish'd rage to madness fires
My bursting veins, oh that I had not known!
What potent charm, what skill medicinal
Can mitigate, without the pow'r of Jove,
These agonizing pangs? Oh might I see
This miracle, though distant! Let me lie,
Ah, let me lie reposed. Why dost thou touch,
Why dost thou raise me up? Each touch is death.
Thou hast awaken'd pangs that were at rest.
Again my tortures are inflamed, again
They rush upon me. Ah, where are you now,
Ye most unjust of all the Grecian race?
With many toils th' infested seas I clear'd,
And all the ruffian-haunted woods; yet now
I miserably perish; not a man
Will bring or fire or sword to put an end
To my afflictions; not a man will come
Willing to rend from me this hated life.

ATT. O thou his son, this task requires a strength
Greater than mine; assist him thou, thine eye
Quicker than mine sees what may give him aid.

HYLL. I touch him, but to mitigate his pains
Exceeds my pow'r, and all the healing art
Avails not: that must be the work of Jove.

HERC. My son, my son, where art thou? In thy arms
Raise me, support me. O my cruel fate!
This fierce, immedicable, wasting pest
Attacks, again attacks me; wretched me!
O Pallas, it consumes me. O my son,

In pity to thy father draw thy sword,
And plunge it deep into my throat; the deed
Will not be impious; heal these torturing pangs
Inflicted by thy mother's wicked hands:
Oh might I see her fall'n, thus fall'n, as me
Her arts have sunk! Thou monarch of the dead,
Brother of Jove, give me a speedy death,
And lay, oh lay a tortured wretch at rest!

CHOR. My friends, chill horror shakes me as I hear
The miseries, which th' illustrious hero bears.

HERC. What fiery and unutterable pains
With rankling venom pierce my hands, my back!
Such not the wife of Jove to me assign'd,
Nor stern Eurystheus, as this treacherous dame,
Daughter of Œneus, whose entangling net,
The texture of the furies, burns my limbs,
And works me death; close to my sides it sticks,
Eats through my skin, and rioting beneath
My vitals drains; already hath it drank
The fresh streams of my blood, and all my flesh
Is wasted, by these gnawing bands consumed.
This not the spear on the ensanguined plain
Uplifted, nor the terrible array
Of earth-born giants, nor the furious force
Of savage beasts roused from their horrid dens,
Nor Grecian, nor Barbarian, nor the rage
Of ruffian bands from which I purged the earth,
Effected; but a single woman, form'd
By nature weak, a woman to the ground
Without a sword hath brought me. But, my son,
Now prove thyself my son, nor more revere
A mother's name; but bring her from the house,
And give her to my hands, that I may know
If more my wretched state afflicts thy heart

Than hers, when thou shalt see her ruin'd form
Defaced by my just vengeance. Go, my son,
Dare this; have pity on me; many feel
The touch of pity for me, as I weep
Like a sick girl lamenting: till this hour
No man can say that e'er his eyes beheld
Such weakness in me; but without a groan
Toils and afflictions always I sustain'd:
But now my firmness sinks, and I am found
Amidst my ills a woman. But, my son,
Come to me, nearer stand, come all, observe
From what a malady these torturing pains
I suffer; look, I throw my vests aside,
Behold this wretched body; what a sight
To move your pity! Ah, this burning spasm
Rends me afresh, it pierces through my sides,
No rest this cruel, gnawing pest allows.
Receive me, O thou monarch of the dead!
Strike me, ye bolts of Jove; O king supreme,
Roll thy red thunders, hurl them on this head,
My father! for it riots now again,
Gains strength, grows fiercer. O my hands, my hands,
My back, my breast, my arms! Are these the nerves
In which I gloried once, whose matchless strength
Quell'd the Nemæan lion which the blood
Of slaughter'd herds distain'd, whose savage rage
None dared approach? Are these the nerves, whose might
Crush'd the Lernæan Hydra, and subdued
The host of monsters to the horse's strength
Joining the human form, a lawless band,
To outrage train'd, exulting in brute force?
The Boar of Erymanthus; the grim Dog
Of hell, three-headed monster, by no arms
To be attack'd, from dire Echidna sprung;

The Dragon, guardian of the golden fruit
On earth's remotest verge? These glorious toils,
These, and a thousand more have I achieved;
But never mortal o'er my glory raised
A trophy: nevertheless now this hardy frame
Is shatter'd, and beneath this blind disease
I waste away; my mother's virtuous name
Avails me not, nor through the starry skies
That I am call'd the son of thundering Jove.
Yet know you this, though I am nothing now,
A weak exhausted nothing, yet e'en thus
I will inflict just vengeance on her head
Who brought me to this state; that she may learn,
And publish to the world, that it is mine
In life or death to punish impious deeds.

CHOR. Unhappy Greece, what sorrows will be thine,
Of his illustrious virtues if bereaved?

HYLL. With leave obtain'd since I may speak to thee,
Hear me with patient silence, though in pain;
For I shall ask what justice wills thou grant.
Give me thyself, with passion less inflamed;
For thus thou canst not know that thy warm wish
Obtain'd would yield thee aught of solid joy,
Or that thy rage without a cause is roused.

HERC. Speak what thou wou'dst, but briefly; 'midst these pains
I comprehend not hints abstruse and dark.

HYLL. Much of my mother, of her present state,
And her unweeting error I would speak.

HERC. O thou most base! And canst thou to my ears
The murderer of thy father name again?

HYLL. Such is her state, that silence in her cause
Would ill become me.

HERC. All her former faults
Might well admit thy plea.

HYLL. So wilt thou judge
Of this day's error.
HERC. Speak, but take good heed
No baseness stain thy nature.
HYLL. She is dead,
Recently slain.
HERC. By whom? Through ills announced
Portentous are thy words.
HYLL. Against her life
Her own bold hand she arm'd.
HERC. Oh that from mine
She had received her meed!
HYLL. The whole truth known,
Soon would thine anger die away.
HERC. Thy words
To something dreadful are a proem: say
Why such thy thought.
HYLL. Unweetingly she err'd,
Her whole intent was good.
HERC. Art thou so base?
Murdering thy father well did she intend?
HYLL. When thy new bride within thy house she saw,
Weening by charms to win thy love, she err'd.
HERC. Whom in these arts so skill'd doth Trachin boast?
HYLL. The Centaur Nessus with his dying breath
Beguiled her with such charm t' inflame thy love.
HERC. Then I am lost indeed; unhappy fate!
I perish, ah, I perish! Now no more
Beams the son's golden light for me; I know
My miserable state. But go, my son,
(Thou hast no more a father) hither bring
Thy brothers, bring them all; and with thee lead
The sorrowing Alcmena, wife of Jove
In vain; that from my lips you yet may hear

The last of Oracles to me announced.

HYLL. Thy mother is not here, but on the banks
Of Tiryns hath her dwelling; of thy sons
Some there she trains, and some at Thebes reside:
We, who are near, if aught thou would'st require,
Hearing thy mandates will perform the charge.

HERC. Then hear thou me; for now thou art arrived
At such an age as to the world may show
The virtues of the man, and of my son.
To me long since my awful sire declared
That by no living mortal I should die,
But by the dead, in the dark realms below
By one that hath his mansion: this is he,
The Centaur Nessus, by the voice divine
Foretold; though long since dead, me of my life
He hath bereaved. Attend, while yet I speak
Of oracles late utter'd, which accord
With those of former times: When I had reach'd
The forest of the Selli, (an hard race
That o'er the mountains roam at large, and rest
Couch'd on the ground) these from the vocal oak
Of Jove I wrote; and thus its voice announced,
That when the hours should bring this time to life,
All my impending toils should find an end.
I fondly thought of life and happy days,
Whilst it denoted nothing but my death;
For the dead rest secure from toils. These truths

L. 1242. Electryon, the father of Alcmena, was king of Tiryns.

L. 1258. Homer speaks of these priests in an address to Jupiter as presiding on Dodona's vocal hill,

Whose groves the Selli, race austere! surround,
Their feet unwash'd, their slumbers on the ground;
Who hear, from rustling oaks thy dark decrees,
And catch the fates low-whisper'd in the breeze.

Pope. Iliad xvi. 288.

Are clear, my son; behoves thee then to aid
Thy father, nor provoke my harsh rebukes;
Act of thine own accord, and this great law,
Obedience to a father's will, observe.

HYLL. I tremble at the words thy mournful state
Declaring; but thy will shall be obey'd.

HERC. First give me thy right hand.

HYLL. This pledge of faith
Why thus demanded?

HERC. Wilt thou give it strait,
And not oppose my will?

HYLL. I stretch it, see;
Nothing shall be refus'd.

HERC. Now by the head
Of Jove my father swear.

HYLL. To do what deed?
Speak, and receive my faith.

HERC. Swear to perform
What I command.

HYLL. I swear; be witness, Jove!

HERC. If thou art false, call vengeance on thy head.

HYLL. I fear not vengeance, I will do the deed;
Yet be the awful imprecation made.

HERC. Know'st thou the highest point of Œta's mount
Sacred to Jove?

HYLL. I know it well, for oft
The victim have I offer'd on that mount.

HERC. Thither this body it behoves thee now
With thine own hands to bear, and with such friends
As thou shalt need; there raise an ample pile,
Much from the deeply-rooted oak, and much
From the wild olive hewn; and on it place
This body; waving then the blazing torch,
Set it on fire; and let no mark of grief

Attend the deed; but, if thou art my son,
Do it without a groan, without a tear;
Else shall my curse amidst the realms beneath
Await thee, and hang heavy on thy heart.

HYLL. Ah me, my father, what hast thou enjoin'd!

HERC. What must be done: if not, some other deem
Thy father, and be call'd my son no more.

HYLL. To what a deed wou'dst thou excite thy son,
To kill my father with a murderer's hand!

HERC. Not so: thy lenient hand I only ask
To heal the anguish of my dreadful ills.

HYLL. How by these flames thy body can I heal?

HERC. If thy soul shrink from this, perform the rest.

HYLL. These arms shall bear thee, faithful to the task.

HERC. And wilt thou raise, as charged, the ample pile?

HYLL. So that my hands are guiltless of its flames,
And of thy death, thy charge I will obey.

HERC. With this I will be satisfied: yet more
One grace, a small one, to the greater add.

HYLL. Great though it be, it shall not be refused.

HERC. The virgin daughter of Œchalia's king
Thou knowest?

HYLL. Iole, if just my thought.

HERC. Most just. This charge I give thee, Her, my son,
When I am dead (since thou hast shown a will
Prompt to be pious) mindful of thine oath
Espouse; and let no man, thy self except,
Her, for my bed design'd, presume to touch;

L. 1319. Unless the participle κλιθῆναι be taken in this sense, the request of Hercules must be very absurd, and even impious. He had before spoken of Iole as a virgin, τὴν Εὐρυτίδην παρθένον; Hyllus objects to her as the fatal cause of his mother's death and his father's miseries. This Hercules would not hear. Hyllus then with great delicacy hints at his father's too intimate connexion with her, on which account his own marriage with her would

But give her thy fond love, my son; indulge
Thy father's wish: this slight request refused,
Things of high import granted lose their grace.
HYLL. Anger, in pity of his pains, subsides;
But such a wayward fancy who can bear?
HERC. Thou wilt not then with my request comply.
HYLL. Her, of my mother's death that was alone
The guilty cause, that brought thee to this state,
Her, by the vengeful furies if not urged,
Who would receive? No; rather let me die,
Than dwell with those whom most my soul abhors.
HERC. This youth, it seems, a dying father's charge
Reveres not; but a curse shall from the gods
Await thy disobedience to my will.
HYLL. Ah, to thy body not confined, I fear,
Thy reason soon this malady will reach.
HERC. And thou the cause; for thou again dost rouse
My sleeping pains.
HYLL. Unhappy me, what doubts
Distract my soul!
HERC. Thy soul averse disdains
A father's mandates.
HYLL. Shall I then be taught
To do an impious deed?
HERC. If it delights
My heart, not impious is the deed.
HYLL. Thy son
Dost thou with justice to this deed impel?
HERC. I call the gods to witness, it is just.
HYLL. Then I will do it, nor oppose thy will,
Appealing to the gods that in good truth
This is thy work: nor shall I e'er be deem'd

be impious; Hercules calls the gods to witness that it would not be a deed of impiety, but of justice; on which Hyllus immediately consents.

Impious, a father's charge whilst I obey.

HERC. Thou hast concluded well: and now, my son,
To all thy former add one speedy grace;
Ere fierce convulsions seize me, or the whirl
Of madness, lay me on the pyre. Come then,
This toil refuse not, raise me, bear me hence;
This is my rest from ills, this my last end.

HYLL. Nothing restrains us from this act, thus urged
By thy command, my father, thus compell'd.

HERC. Now my firm soul, ere this disease return
To torture me, with steel, with adamant
Close up my lips, let not a cry break forth,
For this unpleasing work now gives me joy.

HYLL. You, who attend, take up your lord: my part
In this sad business justly claims excuse.
But in this horrible event the gods,
Who gave him being, and are fathers call'd,
Yet unconcern'd such sufferings can behold,
Show that their minds are ruthless. Mortal man
Sees not the future: we the present feel,
Mournful to us, disgraceful to the gods,
But most severe to him who bears these ills.

SEMI. Virgin, go hence: thou hast beheld the deaths
Of the illustrious, and their recent woes;
Dreadful events, but all ordain'd by Jove.

AJAX.

PERSONS OF THE DRAMA.

MINERVA

ULYSSES

AJAX

TECMESSA

TEUCER

MENELAUS

AGAMEMNON

MESSENGER

CHORUS OF SALAMINIAN SAILORS.

AJAX.

THE contest for the arms of Achilles, the decision in favour of Ulysses, the indignation, madness, and death of Ajax, are circumstances well known: on these Sophocles formed the tragedy now before the reader; it has ever been esteemed as one of his greatest works: it is so.

The first scene may be considered as a prologue. The part which Minerva is made to act in it is, under every light in which it may be viewed, grossly absurd; it is more worthy of Lucian and his Momus, than of Sophocles and the Goddess of Wisdom. But such representations of the gods show us how miserably the human mind was darkened amidst the boasted light of nature and reason. We forgive the poet however for the sake of the fine reflection made by Ulysses at the sight of Ajax in his frenzy, and for the humble piety which Mi-

nerva inculcates: this indeed is to the purpose, as a contemptuous disregard of the gods was the crime for which Ajax was punished.

The subject in itself is all fierceness and horror: this the poet has softened by introducing the mild but unfortnuate Tecmessa. Her first appearance is interesting; her narrative preserves a sober decorum on a subject of the greatest importance to her, and to the Salaminian sailors, but totally void of dignity and grace. She shows the most amiable gentleness to her loved and honoured lord. When she endeavours to dissuade him from his dreadful purpose, her arguments are dictated by reason and affection, yet they are warm and impassioned, and enforced with all the enthusiasm of eloquent grief. Her lamentations over his body, after he has fallen upon his sword, are the genuine effusions of a tender and afflicted heart: the miseries of her own situation, and of her son's, rise before her in all their horrors; but she soon loses sight of them, and dwells with mournful fondness on the virtues of the dead; her grief is severe, but modest, affectionate, and pathetic.

In Ajax, after he had recovered his senses, we find a sullen melancholy, consciousness of his own worth, implacable resentment, shame, desperation, and an inflexible resolution not to survive his lost glory: every part is animated, noble, and grand; but it is a terrible grandeur. His pretended change

of this resolution, necessary for the accomplishment of his purpose, must have a fine effect in the representation; it gives his friends hope, and diffuses a calm over their minds; but it is the deceitful calm previous to a storm, which soon bursts upon them with destructive violence.

With the death of Ajax, according to modern ideas, the drama should end; but the injuries offered to him, and the afflictions of his friends had not yet an end. We know that to be deprived of the rites of sepulture was to the ancients more terrible than death itself; this occasions a further and a deeper distress. We may be assured that the political enmity of the Athenians to the Spartans and Argives was the cause of this odious representation of Menelaus and Agamemnon; it had this happy effect, it gave the poet an opportunity of introducing the affectionate and high-spirited Teucer, and of enriching the drama with an animated contest, which must have produced the most fatal events, had it not been happily appeased by the generous prudence of Ulysses.

The scene is before the tent of Ajax, the last in station; so that it has the camp and fleet of the Grecians stretching along the shore to the west, a valley terminated by mount Ida lying to the east. The simplicity of the ancient drama generally confined the whole representation to one place, from which the Chorus was not allowed to depart. So-

phocles has here ventured to vary the scene, and to disperse the Chorus, whom he brings together again in a wood at the foot of Ida, where Ajax had fallen upon his sword. The reader of taste will rise, with the poet, superior to the rules of criticism, and acknowledge that even the single speech of Ajax over his sword is of more value than all the Unities.

AJAX.

1....12

MINERVA, ULYSSES.

MIN. Son of Laertes, oft have I observed
Thy watchful promptness 'gainst the foe to seize
Each fit occasion; and I see thee now
Ranging long time around the naval tent
Of Ajax, last in station; thy keen eye
Marking the fresh impression of his steps,
That thou may'st know if in the tent he rests.
Well hast thou traced him, like the Spartan hound
Of scent sagacious: in the tent he rests,
Sweat from his temples streaming, and his hands
With slaughter stain'd; to cast thy searching eye
Within these gates is needless; but declare

L. 5. This is from Homer, Iliad xi. v. 7. It was the post of danger and of honour, therefore assigned to Achilles and Ajax, in whose superior strength and valour the Grecian army confided.

L. 8. Æschylus has given the same image, and used the same word,

This stranger seems, like the nice-scented hound,
Quick in the trace of blood, which she will find.

Agamemn. v. 1102.

The cause productive of this anxious toil,
That by my knowledge thou may'st be inform'd.

ULYS. Ye accents of Minerva, of the gods
Most friendly to me! Well, O queen, I know
Thy voice, though thou not seen; it strikes my sense
Clear as the Tuscan trumpet's brass-tuned notes.
Just is thy knowledge that my circling step
Traces a foe, Ajax, whose arm sustains
The broad circumference of the massy shield;
Him, and none other, long time have I traced.
This night against us he hath done a deed
Which reason starts at, if the deed be his,
For we know nothing certain, but are lost
In doubt: mine therefore is it to sustain
This voluntary toil; for all our herds,
Prize of our arms, the herdsmen too we find
Fresh slaughter'd by some wasting hand; to him
The general voice this odious deed imputes:
And one, who, as he walk'd the nightly round,
Descried him bounding o'er the fields alone,
The blood fresh dropping from his sword, to me
Disclosed it: instant on his steps I press
Tracing their marks, now certain, now perplex'd.
But opportune thy coming; for thy hand
Hath been in all my actions past, in all
Of future enterprise shall be my guide.

MIN. I know it well; and friendly to thy search
Attended thee a guardian on thy way.

ULYS. Say then, propitious goddess, have my toils
Just cause?

MIN. They have: those deeds were his.

ULYS. What urged
His frentic hand?

MIN. Rage, for the glorious arms

Which once Achilles bore.

ULYS. Why on our herds
Fell then his wild assault?

MIN. He deem'd his hand
Stain'd with your blood.

ULYS. Was the assault design'd
Against the Grecians?

MIN. He had work'd his will,
Had not my care been watchful.

ULYS. With what bold
And daring thought?

MIN. With guile by night alone
He rush'd upon you.

ULYS. Far as he design'd
Advanced he?

MIN. To the two imperial tents.

ULYS. What then restrain'd his hand athirst for blood?

MIN. I check'd him from the savage joy his heart
Conceived, presenting to his eyes wild forms
Of sick imagination; on the herds
I turn'd him, and the undivided spoils
By herdsmen watch'd; on these he rush'd, and spread
Wide slaughter 'midst the horned droves, around
Whirling his sword; th' Atridæ now he ween'd
Fell by his hand, and now some other Chief,
Each after each; his mind with frenzy seized,
I urged him on, and drove him into toils
Thus wretchedly entangled. When his hand
From this wild slaughter ceased, the herds not slain
And all the flocks he seized, in fetters bound,
And drove them to his tent, deeming them men,
Not horned herds: there now with many a lash
He makes his captives feel his frentic rage.
But I will show thee his distemperature,

To all the Grecians that thou may'st report
What thou hast seen. Call up thy firmness, stay,
Of ill not apprehensive; I will turn
His eyes aside to cast no glance on thee.
Ho there! To thee, who on thy captives' hands
Art fixing chains, to thee I call; come forth;
Ajax I call, come forth before the tent.

ULYS. What dost thou, goddess? What is thy intent?
Call him not forth.

MIN. Stand silent; do not fear.

ULYS. Nay by the gods! Suffice it he remains
Within the tent.

MIN. Why should he not come forth?
Was not the man before

ULYS. To me a foe;
And such he is e'en now.

MIN. Is there a joy
More grateful to the soul, than to deride
Our enemies?

ULYS. Enough for me, O queen,
That he remains within.

MIN. Dost thou then fear
To see a madman?

ULYS. Were his senses sound,
I should not fear him.

MIN. Thee, though present, now
He shall not see.

ULYS. How not, since with his eyes
He sees as usual?

MIN. I will cloud his sight.

ULYS. All may be done which the immortal gods
Design.

MIN. Stand silent; where thou art, remain.

ULYS. I shall, though hence more willing to retire.

MIN. Ho, Ajax, ho! to thee again I call.
To thy associate why no more respect?

MINERVA, ULYSSES, AJAX.

AJAX. Minerva, hail! Hail, progeny of Jove!
How opportune thy aid! With golden spoils
Thee for this glorious capture will I crown.
MIN. Thy promise I approve. But tell me this,
Well hast thou tinged thy sword with Argive blood?
AJAX. I have much cause to glory; nor the deed
Will I deny.
MIN. And hast thou raised the spear
Against th' Atridæ?
AJAX. Never shall they more
Dishonour Ajax.
MIN. They are dead then; so
Thy words import, if I conceive them right.
AJAX. Both dead: now let them take my arms away.
MIN. Well: but that other from Laertes sprung,
What fate is his? Hath he escaped thy hand?
AJAX. Where that accurst inveigler dost thou ask?
MIN. I of thy rival, of Ulysses speak.
AJAX. With joy I hold him, goddess, in my tent
In chains: I would not that he yet should die.
MIN. What wou'dst thou do? What more wou'dst thou obtain?
AJAX. Bound to the pillar which supports my tent.....
MIN. What further vengeance would thy rage assign?
AJAX. His back the scourge shall gore; then let him die.
MIN. Nay, thus severely torture not the wretch.
AJAX. In all besides I yield me to thy will;
This vengeance, and none other, he shall feel.
MIN. Since to do this is pleasing to thee, use
Thy hand, and nothing of thy purpose spare.
AJAX. I go to do it; but entreat this grace,

Always, as now, my firm associate stand.

MINERVA, ULYSSES.

MIN. Thou seest, Ulysses, what the pow'r of gods.
Who was of thought more prudent than this man?
Who, when occasion call'd, in act more brave?

ULYS. I know not any; and I pity him,
Since now unhappy, though to me a foe,
For in the chain of ruin he is bound.
And this respects his state not more than mine.
For all that live, I see, are nothing more
Than phantoms form'd of air, and shadows light.

MIN. Hast thou a sense of this? Against the gods
Utter no vaunt profane; nor swell with pride,
More puissant if thy hand, or thy wealth rise
In ampler stores. All human things a day
In darkness sinks, a day to light restores.
The gods too love the sober, modest mind,
The arrogant and impious they abhor.

CHORUS.

O son of Telamon, whose ample sway
Deep-rooted in the sea, that rolls around,
The strong based shores of Salamis obey,
When with success and glory thou art crown'd
My heart beats high with joy: but when the hand
Of angry Jove afflicts thee, or thy fame
Greece taints with envious and malignant blame,
I fear, I tremble like the fluttering dove.
Such terrors now around us blackening stand:
For slander says that o'er the pastured plain
By thee this night the flocks, the herds were slain,
Spoils of the ravaged vales, (O deed abhorr'd!)
Slain by thy flaming sword.

Such tales Ulysses with insidious art
Against thee forms, and whispers in each ear;
His specious fictions all believe who hear,
Feeling more joy than cheers th' inventor's heart,
And with malicious insults mocks thy woes.
Who wings his shafts against the great and high,
Unerring to the mark beholds them fly:
'Gainst me their aim they lose.
Envy crawls on, the potent keen to wound;
Yet, when the hour brings danger forth, the low
Without them are a tottering bulwark found;
These in the great their strong protectors know,
The great by these protected firmly stand.
But to th' insensate wisdom speaks in vain:
Such this tumultuous train,
And to repel their insults weak our hand,
Weak without thee: for now, escaped thy sight,
Like flocks of birds they scream, and vex the ear:
Wou'dst thou, O king, appear,
With awe they view the lordly vulture's flight,
And all their clamorous cries are hush'd through fear.
Thee hath the Virgin Huntress sprung from Jove,
Whose altars o'er the Scythian Taurus flame,
(O wild report, thou parent of our shame!)
Urged 'mongst the herds with slaughtering rage to rove,
To her no honours for some conquest paid?
Didst thou the glorious spoils of war detain?
Were her loved hinds beneath thy arrows slain,
As fearless o'er some hallow'd vale they stray'd?
Did the stern god, that in th' ensanguin'd field
Lifts high his blazing shield,
In vengeance send, defrauded of his right,
The frenzy of the night?

For never, did thy sense its seat maintain,
O son of Telamon, with rage possest
Wou'dst thou spread carnage o'er the pastured plain.
Heav'n-sent this wild disease hath fired thy breast.
O Phœbus, and thou ruler of the sky,
Avert this ill report! To blast thy fame
If the great kings, and chiefs of mighty name,
In secret basely forge this calumny,
Or he of the accurst Sisyphian race,
Yield not to the disgrace;
Nor, thine eye fix'd within thy naval tent,
The vile report augment.
Rise, king of Salamis, assert thy fame:
Why to thy seat thus fixed? Thy long delay
Adds to this heav'n-sent mischief fiercer flame.
For uncontroll'd the insults of thy foes,
Like fires exposed to winds, now force their way.
No bounds the spreading slander knows;
From tongue to tongue the taunts, the mockings roll;
And anguish rends my soul.

TECMESSA, CHORUS.

TECM. Ye faithful train, that o'er the billows steer
The bark of Ajax, from Erectheus sprung
A generous race, with sorrow pierced we groan,
Who in a foreign land with zeal attend
The house of Telamon: for now the great,
The strong, the daring Ajax sinks beneath
The turbid storm of a distemper'd mind.

CHOR. What weight of sorrow hath this night produced
Changing the fortune of the former day,
Daughter of Phrygian Teuthras, tell thy friends;
For since his spear achieved thee as his prize,
The ardent Ajax gave thee all his love;

Thou then, as one not ill inform'd, canst speak.

TECM. How can I speak unutterable ills?
This will fall on thee with a weight like death;
Such thou wilt feel it: for with frenzy seized
This night th' illustrious Chief hath done a deed
Destructive to his fame: within the tent
Thou may'st behold the victims of his sword
Weltering in gore, and slaughter'd by his hand.

CHOR. What hast thou said of one, that in the works
Of war flamed foremost! We can neither bear
The infamy, nor shun it. By the Chiefs
Already it is whisper'd, and anon
Wide through the Grecian camp it will be spread.
Ah me! I fear th' advancing ills; the man
By the same hand, by frenzy arm'd, will die,
Amidst the darkness of the night which whirl'd
His sword, and with the herdsmen slew the herds.

TECM. Ah, what a grief! Thence, thence he came, and led
The herds as captives; some within the tent
He slew, and on the ground some mangled lie.
Two rams of snow-white fleece he seized; from one
He rent away the tongue, smote off the head,
And threw it from him; to a pillar high
The other bound, then snatch'd his chariot-reins,
And scourges it with many a sounding stroke,
Reviling it with loud and shameful taunts,
The dictates of some Fury, not of man.

CHOR. Time is it then we veil our heads, and steal
With secret foot away; or mount our seats,
Ply the strong oar, and to the ocean give
Our lightly-bounding bark. Such threats severe
The sons of Atreus, who command our host,
Denounce against us: crush'd with stones, I fear,
We too shall feel their vengeance, with our lord

Now struggling in the bonds of ruthless fate.

TECM. Not struggling now, for, as the boisterous South
That rose without the lightening's flashing fires,
His rage subsides. But to his sense return'd
A new affliction grieves him; for to view
Ills all our own, where no associate shares
The deed, with keenest anguish racks the heart.

CHOR. But we are happy if his sense returns;
The ill now ceased, less anxious are our fears.

TECM. Hadst thou thy choice, wou'dst thou with grief afflict
Thy friends, that unshared pleasure might be thine;
Or bear in mutual grief a mutual part?

CHOR. The double, lady, is the greater ill.

TECM. We, the disease not sharing, feel its pains.

CHOR. Why this? I know not what thy words import.

TECM. When his disease raged highest, in the ills,
Which round encompass'd him, he felt a joy,
To us, whose sense was perfect, causing grief.
Now he is calm, and from his wild disease
Breathes free, with anguish all his soul is rack'd,
Nor less is our affliction than before.
From single is not this a double ill?

CHOR. To thee my heart assents; and much I fear
Some fatal stroke impending from a god:
Else why, his mind now calm, no more of joy
Feels he, than 'midst the storm of his disease?

TECM. Be thou assured that things have reach'd this height.

CHOR. But tell us how this sudden ill began;
For we too melt in sympathy of woe.

TECM. Thou shalt know all, as one that shares the grief.
The night was far advanced, the evening lamps

L. 252. The Scholiast informs us that those, who are acquainted with the nature of the winds, have observed that when the South rises not attended with lightening, its violence soon ceases.

No longer blazed, when grasping in his hand
His dreadful sword, he bent his eager steps
Towards the passes from all haunt now clear;
I gently chide him, What thy purpose now?
Why, Ajax, when no summons, nor the voice
Of herald calls thee, nor the trumpet's sound,
Why thus rush forth? Now all the army sleeps.
Few were his words, the tune of every tongue,
"To women silence gives their proper grace."
I stood rebuked, he issued forth alone.
What then befel I know not: he return'd
Driving in bonds the bulls, the herdsmen's dogs,
And lowing herds; some by his sword was slain,
And hewn in pieces; some like captives bound,
Raging against the flocks, he scourged as men.
At length he issued from the tent, and held
Long converse with some shadow; of the sons
Of Atreus much, and of Ulysses much
He spoke, and laugh'd aloud, how their base deeds
He in this sally amply had revenged.
Entering the tent again his sense at length
Slow he regain'd; but when he saw the ground
With carnage cover'd thus, he smote his head,
And raised a mournful cry; then prostrate lay
Stretch'd 'midst the havoc of the slaughter'd flocks,
Rending with violence his hair. Long time
He lay, nor utter'd word; with rigorous threats
Then bade me tell him every circumstance
Of what had pass'd, and whence the carnage ask'd
That lay around him: struck with fear, my friends,
Distinct I told him all that had been done,

L. 290. This is from Callistratus, "As leaves are an ornament to trees, "their fleeces to sheep, their manes to horses, the beard to men, so silence is "an ornament to women." Schol.

Far as I knew it; strait with mournful cries
Loud he lamented; such from him before
I never heard; for wailings he disdain'd
As marks of base and abject minds, nor gave
His griefs a voice, but like a murmuring bull
Groan'd inwardly: and now in this ill plight,
Refusing to be cheer'd with food or wine,
Grovelling amidst the slaughter'd herds he sits
In gloomy silence, forming in his mind
Some ill intent; this his imperfect words
And griefs denote. But, O my friends, (this cause
Impell'd me forth to seek you) go to him,
Give him your aid, if aught avails your pow'r;
Oft on such minds the words of friends prevail.

CHOR. Daughter of Teuthras, dreadful to our ears
Thy words, that Ajax groans beneath such ills.

AJAX. Ah me, unhappy me! [*within.*

TECM. To greater height it soon will rise, I fear,
Did you not hear his loud and mournful groans?

AJAX. Ah me, unhappy me! [*within.*

CHOR. He seems disorder'd now; or keen remorse
For what is past with anguish stings his soul.

AJAX. My son, my son! [*within.*

TECM. Ah me! Eurysaces, for thee he calls.
What now impels him? Where art thou, my child?

AJAX. Teucer! Where art thou, Teucer? In the prey [*within.*
For ever active? whilst I perish here.

CHOR. His sense seems perfect: open wide the doors:
Regard for us perchance may calm his mind.

TECM. Behold I open them: thou may'st now view
His deeds, and all the misery of his state.

AJAX, TECMESSA, CHORUS.

AJAX. My friends, who with me mount the stately bark,

Alone, of all my friends, to faith's firm law
Alone adhering; from the raging storm
Behold what bloody waves around me swell.

CHOR. Thy words too strongly bore the stamp of truth: [*to Tecmessa*
How high his frenzy rose these deeds declare.

AJAX. My brave associates in each naval art,
Who grasp the strong oar, and impel the bark
Light bounding o'er the billows, you alone
With kind regard are present to my aid;
Draw all your swords, and end this hated life.

CHOR. Do not to ills ill medicines apply,
Nor a severer anguish add to grief.

AJAX. Thou seest the bold, the brave, the mighty Chief,
Intrepid in the shock of hostile arms,
Now dreadful 'midst the herds secure of harm,
How to derision and reproach exposed!

TECM. Not thus, my lord, loved Ajax, speak not thus.

AJAX. Wilt thou not hence, wilt thou not hence retire?
O wretch, wretch, wretch!

CHOR. Now, by the gods, be calm:
Let reason reassume its sober rule.

AJAX. Unhappy me, who let those fiends accursed
Escape my hands, and falling with wild rage
On the fair herds distain'd my sword with blood!

CHOR. Why for deeds past shou'dst thou afflict thy mind?
Immutably they must be what they are.

AJAX. Thou ever lurking spy, thou ready tool
Always of every ill, of all the host
The basest, foulest, most insidious wretch,
Son of Laertes, how wilt thou rejoice,
And laugh, and revel at my miseries!

CHOR. Each, as the god assigns, or laughs or weeps.

AJAX. Oh might I see him, though thus crush'd with ills!
Ah miserable me!

CHOR. Proud menaces ill suit thy hapless state.
AJAX. O Jove, thou father of my ancestors,
First let me crush this wily juggling foe,
And the two Chiefs that with imperial pow'r
Command the Grecian host, then let me die!
TECM. If such thy wish, wish too that I may die:
For what is life to me, if thou art dead?
AJAX. O darkness, now my light! Ye dreary shades
Of Erebus, to me sole brightness now,
Receive, receive your habitant; receive
A wretch no longer worthy to behold
The race of gods, or mortal men! Me now
They nought avail: for me the potent queen,
Daughter of Jove, with vengeful hand afflicts
E'en to destruction. Whither can I fly?
Or where remain? My former fame, my friends,
Is lost; and these last deeds have sunk me down
With infamy amidst these foolish spoils;
And all the host takes arms against my life.
TECM. What grief is mine that so renown'd a Chief
Should speak a language till this hour unheard!
AJAX. Ye streams that roll into the sea, ye caves
Deep in the rocks that wind along the shore,
Thou grove on Ida's brow, long time, long time
Have you round Troy detain'd me; but no more
Shall you detain me breathing vital air:
This let each man, that hath his reason, know.
And thou, Scamander, flowing near these tents,
Benignant to the Grecians, shalt no more
Behold this man (thus proudly I will speak)
Such as 'mongst all the host, that o'er her plains
March'd from the realms of Greece, Troy hath not seen:

L. 375. Telamon, the father of Ajax, was the son of Æacus, Æacus was the son of Jupiter: Sic ab Jove tertius Ajax.

Now, all his glory sunk, thus low he lies.

CHOR. I have not pow'r, 'midst these afflicting ills,
Or to repress, or to allow thy words.

AJAX. Ah me! what heart could e'er conceive the thought
That Misery and Ajax should be found
So near allied! My very name conveys
The sound of woe, connected with such ills.
My father, 'midst the martial host of Greece
First in renown, and for his noble deeds
Graced with the prize of honour, to his house
Bore from this land of Ida all that arms
Could give of glorious boast. But I, his son,
To the same fields of Troy with no less strength
Advancing, deeds as noble by my hands
Achieved, dishonour'd by the Argives lie,
And perish thus. Yet well am I assured
If now Achilles lived t' adjudge his arms
The prize of valour and exalted worth,
No man would take them from me: but the sons
Of Atreus, slighting my illustrious deeds,
Assign them to a wretch expert in wiles.
Had not my cheated eye, had not my sense
Perverted led me from my purpose wide,
Such judgment never had they giv'n again.
But now the dauntless goddess sprung from Jove,
Bearing the terrors of her gorgon shield,
E'en when my hand was raised against them, spread
Illusion round me, and my sense disturb'd
With frenzy, that amidst the herds I stain'd
My hands with blood; whilst they, against my will
Escaped, deride me. If th' immortal gods
Oppose him, e'en the dastard shall escape
The brave man's vengeance. Me what now behoves?
'Gainst me the hatred of the gods is shown,

The Grecian camp abhors me, and all Troy
Is hostile to me, and these fields around.
Shall I then quit this naval station, leave
The sons of Atreus, and my homeward course
Steer o'er th' Ægean sea? But with what eye
Shall I behold my father? how present
Myself before him? Will he bear my sight
Thus naked, with no martial honours graced,
Whose ample crown of glory he obtain'd?
It is not to be borne. What if I rush
Against the Trojan rampires, and alone
Their pow'rs assaulting, after noble deeds
Perform'd, find there an honourable death?
Thus I should cause the sons of Atreus joy.
This must not be: some means must be emprised
To show my aged father that his son
Glows with the spirit of his high-born race.
For base his mind, who wishes length of life,
When ills, that hope no change, enclose him round.
What pleasure brings the day, which only adds
A day to life, for such a little space
Removing death? Him lightly I esteem,
Who with vain hopes deludes his glowing heart.
To live with glory, or with glory die,
This is the brave man's part. You have my thoughts.

CHOR. No man will ever say these words are false;
They are the genuine dictates of thy heart.
Yet be thou soften'd; let thy friends prevail;
Appease thy mind, nor harbour thoughts like these.

TECM. My lord, loved Ajax, no severer ill,
Than the necessity of fate, can fall
On man's unhappy race. I was born free;
My father 'mongst the Phrygians of high pow'r,
And ample wealth; but now I am a slave;

Such was the pleasure of the gods, and such
Thy puissant hand. Led from that hour to share
Thy bed, to thee benevolent I deem
Thy welfare mine; and by Ephestian Jove,
By the dear tie that binds my fate to thine,
I now implore thee, leave me not exposed
To the offensive insults of thy foes,
Ah, leave me not to other lords a slave!
For, shou'dst thou die, abandon'd and bereaved
Of thee that very day, be thou assured,
I, with thy son, by some proud Argive seized
By force abhorr'd, shall eat the wretched food
Of slavery; and some lord with bitter taunt
Shall cut me to the soul, and say, Behold
The wife of Ajax, of the Grecian host
Once the most potent, from that envied height
Sunk to this abject state of servitude:
Thus shall he taunt me, by ill fate depress'd,
With words to thee disgraceful, and thy race.
But, ah! respect thy father, left to waste
In grief the cheerless hours of age; respect
Thy mother, to the weight of many years
Consign'd; with pray'rs she oft invokes the gods
To see thee in her house with life return'd.
Pity thy son, O king; of thee bereaved,
Who shall instruct and form his infant mind,
Left to unfriendly guardians? Shou'dst thou die,
What ill to him and me dost thou bequeath?
Nothing remains for me, to which mine eye
Looks up, save thee. Beneath thy conquering spear
My ruin'd country, and my mother sunk;

L. 477. Ephestian Jupiter presided over the Hearth shared in common by all who dwelled in the same house.

Fate snatch'd my father to the realms below,
And both my parents have their mansion there.
What country will console me for thy loss,
What wealth? On thee my all of safety rests.
Then hold me in thy memory: it becomes
A man, if aught delightful to his soul
He hath received, to bear a grateful mind:
Kindness gives birth to kindness; in the heart
When grateful memory holds its seat no more,
The man to every generous sense is lost.

CHOR. Oh that thy bosom, Ajax, felt, like mine,
The touch of pity! Thou wou'dst praise her words.

AJAX. Great praise indeed from me she will obtain,
My mandates firmly if she dare perform.

TECM. All, my loved Ajax, all I will perform,
Obedient to thy will.

AJAX. Bring then my son,
That I may see him.

TECM. By my fears alarm'd
Hence I removed him.

AJAX. In these recent ills?
Or what thy fears?

TECM. Lest the unhappy child
By meeting thee should die.

AJAX. With my ill fate
That had accorded.

TECM. Anxious was my care
Secure to keep him.

AJAX. Prudent was the act;
I thank thee for the caution.

TECM. What besides
Grateful to thee can I perform?

AJAX. My son,

Let me speak to him; let me see him.

TECM. Hence
Not far thy menial train attend their charge.

AJAX. Why then to come before me this delay?

TECM. My son, thy father calls thee: in his hands
Whoe'er now holds him, hither let him haste.

AJAX. Comes he thus call'd, or hears he not thy voice?

TECM. Advancing near th' attendant with him comes.

EURYSACES *brought in.*

AJAX. Bring him, nay bring him forward; for the sight
Of the fresh blood, which from this carnage streams,
Will not affright him, if he be my son.
Thus early in his father's rugged lore
He shou'd be train'd, and taught to catch the flame
That glows within this bosom. O my son,
Be happier than thy father: in all else
Be like him: so thou never canst be base.
In this I deem thee blest, that to these ills
Thou art insensible; the sweetest life
Consists in feeling nothing; but by time
Thou will be taught to grieve and to rejoice.
When thou hast reach'd that age, behoves thee show
Among thy father's foes that thou art sprung
Brave from the brave; meanwhile may gentle gales
Around thee breathe, and cherish thy young mind
To joy thy mother's soul. This well I know,
That not a Grecian with disgraceful wrongs
Will dare oppose thee, though of me bereaved:

L. 546. The original here is rendered unintelligible by the insertion of this unhappy line,

Τὸ μὴ φρονεῖν γὰρ, κἄστ' ἀνώδυνον κακὸν,

which Brunck rejects as spurious.

So firm a guardian o'er thee shall I leave
In Teucer, watchful to protect thy youth,
Though chasing now in distant fields the foe.
But now, my brave associates, train'd to lift
The shield in war, and sweep the surging main,
I charge you all (refuse me not this grace)
Announce my mandate to him, let him lead
This child to Salamis, and show him there
To Telamon, and her that shares his bed,
My mother Eribœa, that their age
He always may support, till they descend
To the dark mansions of the king below.
Nor 'midst contending Chiefs shall umpires sit
My arms the prize of glory to adjudge,
Nor he, my baleful pest: but thou, my son,
Retain my ample shield, its seven strong plates
Unpierced by hostile spear; my other arms
Be buried with me.——Take thou now the boy,
And instant lead him hence; nor in the tent
Weep or lament; to wailings nature prompts
A woman's melting soul; compose thy mind:
When ulcer'd wounds the cutting steel require,
No mystic charm the skilful leach applies.

CHOR. I tremble as I hear thy earnest charge:
Unpleasing to me are thy pointed words.

TECM. My lord, loved Ajax, what intends thy thought?

AJAX. Ask not, make no inquiries; teach thy mind
A calm composure; it becomes thee well.

TECM. Despair hangs heavy on me: by the gods,
And by thy son, thy pity I implore,
Ah, leave us not abandon'd and undone!

AJAX. Thou dost offend me highly: know'st thou not
That henceforth nothing to the gods I owe.

TECM. Speak words of happier import.
AJAX. Vain thy cries.
TECM. Hear me, O hear me!
AJAX. I have heard too much.
TECM. O king, I tremble.
AJAX. Instant bear her hence.
TECM. Oh, by the gods, relent!
AJAX. What folly this,
If thou canst think my nature now to form!

CHORUS.

STRO. 1. Illustrious Salamis, around whose shores
The sea with all its wild waves roars,
Conspicuous rise thy cliffs sublime,
And guard, loved isle, thy happy plains.
Whilst me an irksome length of time
In Ida's marshy vales detains:
Unheeded here a wretched life I lead,
Amidst the flocks that graze the meed;
Year after year rolls slow away,
On me hope beams no cheerful ray;
From misery doom'd no pause to know
But in the dark and dreary realms below.

ANTIS. 1. The noble Ajax now with frenzy fired
(Some god the glowing rage inspired)
Immedicable ills sustains;
And with fresh pangs my heart is rent

L. 587. Nothing impious is here intended: the words of Ajax have the same signification as those of Æneas over the dead body of Pallas,

Nos juvenem exanimum, et nil jam cœlestibus ullis
Debentem, vano mœsti comitamur honore.

On which Ruæus says, Vivi subditi sunt superis diis, mortui inferis. Tecmessa understands them in this sense, and deprecates the omen.—Camerarius.

By thee amidst embattled plains
To conquest and to glory sent.
With grief th' illustrious hero we survey
To gloomy madness now a prey;
And all his mighty deeds in war,
Deeds which the highest worth declare,
Are lost, unwelcome to th' unkind,
While folly swells the proud Atridæ's mind.

STRO. 2. Hoary in her locks of age
And worn with many a rolling year,
With what affliction will his mother hear
Her frentic son's distemper'd rage!
Not in soft notes will she complain,
Like Philomela's pity-moving strain;
But she will give loud griefs to rise,
Lamenting with heart-piercing cries;
And in the anguish of despair
Beat her sad breast, and rend her silver hair.

ANTIS. 2. In the silent shades below
Far better were thy doom to rest,
Than thus to breathe the vital air, opprest
With dire disease and hopeless woe;
Thy train of kind affections lost,
And all thy soul in frenzy's whirlwind tost,
Thou high-born Chief, in martial fame
Surpassing all of Grecian name.
These ills how will thy sire deplore,
Ills to his noble race ne'er known before!

AJAX, TECMESSA, CHORUS.

AJAX. Time in the length of its unbounded course
Draws things obscure to light, and sinks in shades
The most conspicuous: no event befals,

But what might be expected; solemn oaths
Yield to assaults, and the obdurate mind.
And I, who late like temper'd steel retain'd
My firmness, by this woman have been taught
A softer tone. I pity her sad state,
Left 'mongst her foes a widow, and my son
An orphan. To the margin of the sea
Hence then I go, and in the cleansing wave
Wash off these stains, if so I may appease
The anger of the goddess. Where I find
A place unmark'd by human foot, this sword,
The most abhorr'd of weapons, in the ground
Deep-buried I will hide, where never eye
Shall see it more; let night, and hell's dark king
Keep it; for from the hour when I received
From Hector's hostile hand this gift, from Greece
No grateful meed, no honour have I shared.
Well was it said, The gifts of hostile hands
Are ever hostile, and with mischiefs fraught.
Henceforth then to the gods we know to yield,
And learn the sons of Atreus to revere;
They are our Chiefs; behoves us to obey:
Why not? the harshest and the strongest things
Yield to their higher sovereigns: for this cause
The Winters stiff with all their snows give place
To summer-glowing with its beauteous fruits;
And the dark circle of the Night retires
That the fair Day may flame with orient light.
A soft gale breathes, and the tempestuous sea,
Groaning beneath impetuous winds, is calm.
E'en all-subduing Sleep unbinds his chain,
And sets his captives free. Why should not I
Know gentler thoughts? This wisdom I have learn'd,

That him, who is my foe, I so may hate
As one perchance to be my friend again;
And so far wish to aid my friend, as one
That may know change: for friendship is a port
In which our bark not always rides secure.
But these things shall be well. Within the tent
Retire, Tecmessa; with incessant vows
Implore the favouring gods that they would grant
My heart's warm wish. And you, my friends, with her
Thus honour me. To Teucer, when he comes
Give this my charge, that mine he make his care,
And be to you benevolent. I go
Where I must go: do you what I command.
Though wretched now, you soon perchance may know
That Ajax from his miseries is relieved.

CHORUS.

STRO. This, Joy, is thy enraptured hour;
I feel thy fierce tumultuous pow'r.
Pan, Iö Pan, wild wanderer o'er each strand,
From Cyllene's craggy brow
Cover'd with perpetual snow,
Amidst the gods thou leader of the band.
Pan, Iö Pan, O king advance,
And share thine own invented dance;
Such Gnossus sees, and Nysa's height;
Such measures now my bounding foot delight.
Hast'ning o'er th' Icarian main,

L. 673. Negabat (Scipio) ullam vocem inimiciorem amicitiæ potuisse reperiri, quam ejus, qui dixisset, ita amare oportere, ut si aliquando esset osurus; nec vero se adduci posse, ut hoc, quemadmodum putaretur, a Biante esse dictum crederet, qui sapiens habitus esset unus e septem, sed impuri cujusdam, aut ambitiosi, aut omnia ad suam potentiam revocantis esse sententiam, &c. Cicero de Amicitia. 16.

Royal Phœbus, Delian king,
'Midst my joy thy presence deign,
And with thee all thy grace benignant bring!

ANTIS. Now all our dark'ning sorrow flies,
And the war brightens to our eyes:
Now all is transport; now the welcome day
Drives the sickly gloom of night;
Now, O Jove, the glorious light
Our ships revisits with its cheering ray:
For Ajax now no more retains
A sense of his distracting pains;
Again his pious thoughts assign
Just honours to the gods, and rites divine.
Strong, O Time, thy withering pow'r:
Bright thou bring'st Hope's gladsome hour!
Our lord no more with anger burns,
And to the royal Chiefs his soul returns.

MESSENGER, CHORUS.

MESS. My friends and fellow soldiers, what hath pass'd
I wish to tell you. From the Mysian heights
Teucer is now arrived: soon as the camp
He enter'd, all the Argive troops at once
Reviled him; while yet distant they perceived
His steps advancing, the tumultuous croud
Gathers arround him, and from every side
Insults him with reproaches; not a man
Check'd his rude tongue; the brother this, they cry,
Of him, whose frentic treachery to the host
Hath done foul wrong; yet shall not all thy pow'r
Protect him from our vengeance. To such height
The tumult rose, that they unsheath'd and shook
Their threatening swords; till some age-honour'd Chiefs
The swelling rage with soothing words appeased.

But where is Ajax? I would tell him this:
For all things to our lords we ought to show.
CHOR. He is not in the tent; he late went forth,
His measures prudent, and his passions calm.
MESS. Alas, too late then hither was I sent,
Or were my steps, false to my charge, too slow?
CHOR. What then is wanted, that required thy speed?
MESS. Teucer gave charge that, till his presence here,
Ajax be not allow'd to quit the tent.
CHOR. He is gone forth; but with more sober thought,
Seeking to calm the anger of the gods.
MESS. These words are full of folly, if the Seer,
Zealous to save him, aught of truth presage.
CHOR. What presage? Of this subject know'st thou aught?
MESS. Thus much I know; for I, as it befel,
Was present. From th' assembled kings apart,
Alone, and distant from th' imperial Chiefs,
Calchas retired, and with a friend's warm zeal
Grasping the hand of Teucer gave him charge
By all the arts could be devised this day,
That now shines o'er us, in his tent restrain'd
From pow'r of roving Ajax to secure,
If e'er he wish'd alive to see him more.
For through this day alone against him flames
The vengeance of Minerva: this the Seer
Pronounced, that useless and unwieldly strength,
Crush'd by th' offended gods, in ruin sinks,
When man of mortal birth with pride aspires
Beyond a mortal. From his house in arms
When marching, thus presumptuous he was found;
My son, his father well advised, in war
Be conquest thy high aim, but with the gods
Always to conquer: He with daring vaunt
Madly replied, The feeble, with the gods

His weakness aiding, conquest may obtain;
I, e'en without the gods, am confident
To snatch that glory. Such his haughty boast:
Nor once alone; but when Minerva's voice
Incited him against the foes to turn
His slaughtering hand, with unbeseeming words
Fierce he replied, Thy favour, goddess, yield
To other Argives; through my post in arms
The war shall never break. With such proud speech
Himself beyond the state of mortal man
Exalting, he to ruthless anger roused
The martial queen. But through this present day
If the impending danger he escape,
Our care may soon avert his fate, the god
No more opposing. Thus the prophet spoke;
And Teucer instant from th' imperial tent
Sent me to thee, with this high mandate charged,
To guard him. If we fail, he is no more,
If Calchas in th' events of fate be skill'd.

CHOR. O thou poor sufferer, wretched in thy fate,
Come forth, Tecmessa, hear these words of woe;
For this cuts deep, and ruins all thy joy.

TECMESSA, CHORUS.

TECM. Why have you roused me from my seat, where late
I found short respite from oppressing ills?

CHOR. Hear thou this man: the charge he bears respects
The fate of Ajax, and excites my grief.

TECM. Speak, man; what say'st thou? Are we then undone?

MESS. Of thy fate I know nothing; but my hopes,
If Ajax from the tent be gone, are lost.

TECM. He is; I therefore dread to hear thy charge.

MESS. This mandate Teucer gave, within the tent
To guard him, not allow'd to rove alone.

TECM. And where is Teucer? Why this mandate giv'n?
MESS. He lately is return'd; but fears th' event
Fatal to Ajax, if he roves abroad.
TECM. Ah wretched me, who taught him thus to fear?
MESS. The fate-fortelling Calchas on this day,
For this to Ajax brings or life or death.
TECM. Save him, my friends, oh save him; haste, prevent
This harsh necessity of fate: fly some
To Teucer, let him come with swiftest speed:
Along the winding shores some to the west,
Some to the orient sun direct your search,
And find th' ill-omen'd wand'rings of your lord.
I know he hath deceived me; I am sunk,
Ah me! an outcast from his former grace.
What shall I do, my son? Not linger here,
But go as far as I have strength to go.
Let us then go, my friends; yes, let us fly;
This no time to sit, if we could save
A man that rushes with such speed to die.
CHOR. I for the search am ready; nor shall words
Alone, but zealous speed my promptness show.
AJAX. There stands the slaughtering sword, and bears its point
In readiness to wound, as one would judge
At leisure viewing it. This was the gift
Of Hector; never stranger to my soul
Like him was hateful, never to my eyes
Was one so odious. In the hostile ground
Of Troy fix'd firm it rears its sharpen'd point.
I fix'd it deep, that friendly it might give
A speedy death: this well I have prepared.
And now thy grace, O Jove, I first implore,
(So right requires) I shall not ask the grant
Of ample honours; send some messenger,
Fraught with the mour[illegible] tidings of my death,

To Teucer, that he first may bear me hence
Fallen on this sword fresh-dropping with my blood;
Nor let me by my foes first seen be cast
To birds obscene and hungry dogs a prey:
This I implore of thee, O Jove. Thee next,
Hermes, thou guide to the infernal realms,
Thee I invoke; be no fierce writhings mine
Of lingering and convulsive agonies;
But lead me gently to the shades below,
Soon as this sword shall pierce my side. And you,
For ever virgins, and for ever prompt
To aid, for ever viewing all the ills
Of suffering mortals, in pursuit untired,
On you, ye awful goddesses, I call;
Mark how I perish, wretched in my fate,
Crush'd by the sons of Atreus; their base hearts
May basest miseries rend; as they destroy,
Be they destroy'd; my blood as they behold
By mine own hand thus shed, be their blood shed
With rage remorseless by the hands of those
Whom with parental love they hold most dear:
Go then, ye swift-avenging Furies, go,
Lap their vile blood, of all the Grecian host
Spare not a man. And thou, O Sun, who rollest
Through yon ethereal height thy radiant car,
My country when thou seest, thy golden rein
Draw back, and to my aged father tell,
Tell the unhappy queen that gave me birth,

L. 837. Cassandra in the Agamemnon of Æschylus, makes the same prayer,

And further I adjure these gates of hell,
Well may the blow be aim'd, that whilst my blood
Flows in a copious stream, I may not feel
The fierce convulsive agonies of death:
But gently sink, and close my eyes in peace.

My miseries and my death: the cries of grief,
When she shall hear these tidings, she will raise
Through all the city. But lamenting strains
Have hear no place: the deed must now be dared.
O Death, O Death, advance; behold me now;
Soon in thy mansions shall I dwell, and there
Hold converse with thee. To the golden beams
Of this bright day; to thee, resplendent Sun,
Rolling on high, I make my last address,
Henceforth I never shall address you more.
O light of heav'n; and O thou sacred soil
Of Salamis, my country; O ye gods,
That guard my hearth; thou, Athens, high in fame,
And you, her sons, with whom my youth was train'd;
Ye fountains here, ye rivers, and ye fields
Of Troy, by you I long have been sustain'd;
You I address, to you I bid farewell;
Ajax to you speaks his last words; henceforth
My converse will be in the realms beneath.

SEMI. Toil brings increase of toil; for where, ah where
Have I not ranged to seek him? Yet no place
Knows to inform me. Hist: I hear a sound.

SEMI. Our mates, who with us mount the gallant bark.

SEMI. What tidings?

SEMI. To the west along the ships
My weary steps have traced.

SEMI. And hast thou found——

SEMI. Enough of toil, but nothing more in sight.

SEMI. Nor to the east as I pursued my way
To me did any trace of him appear.

SEMI. What pow'r, ah me! what pow'r of those that rule,
Delighted with the task, the ocean-waves,
Holding his sleepless seat; what god enthroned

On high Olympus; or what conscious stream
That rolls his flood into the Bosphorus,
If he hath seen the stern unyielding Chief,
Will tell me where he wanders? Hard for me
After long toils to sink in blank despair,
Nor find where from my sight conceal'd he lies.

TECM. Ah me! Ah me! [*in the grove.*

CHOR. What voice of mourning from the grove resounds?

TECM. O thou unhappy!

CHOR. I see th' ill-fated captive of his spear
Tecmessa, bending as oppress'd with woe.

TECM. Woe, ruin, desolation close me round.

CHOR. What hath befallen

TECM. Behold, behold, my friends, yet warm in death
Where Ajax lies, roll'd on his deep-plunged sword.

CHOR. Alas for my return! Ah, thou hast slain
With thee, O king, thy comrade in the bark.
O wretched me! O thou afflicted dame!

TECM. I at this sight have cause indeed for grief.

CHOR. Whose hand employ'd he in this deed of death?

TECM. Doubtless his own: fix'd in the ground the sword,
On which he fell, of this gives certain proof.

CHOR. Thy loss to me is ruin. Thou in blood
Hast fall'n alone, and nigh thee not a friend
To guard thee. I was witless, void of sense,
Thus to neglect thee. Where lies Ajax, where
Lies the indignant, stern, ill-fated Chief?

TECM. It is a sight of horror: I will wrap
This robe around him, with its ample folds
Covering his corse: for none, that was his friend,
Can bear to see him from his nostrils breathe
The purple gore, and from the blackening wound

L. 890. The Chorus here speaks of Mount Ida and the sea before him under Grecian names: there is another instance of this in the Philoctetes.

By his own hand inflicted. Wretched me,
What can I do? What friend will bear him hence?
Where now is Teucer? Hither should he bend
His steps, how opportunely would he come
The corse of his fallen brother to compose!
O hapless Ajax, what heroic worth
Was thine! What art thou now? Such, that thy foes
Would pity thee, and o'er thee drop a tear.

CHOR. Fix'd was thy purpose, yes, ill-fated Chief,
Inflexibly thy heart was fix'd to seize
Fit time t' accomplish this disastrous end
Of thy unbounded griefs: such were thy groans
By night, by day; such thy relentless hate,
With passions breathing ruin, 'gainst the sons
Of Atreus. The deep cause of all thy ills
Rose from the contest for the glorious meed
To valour due, the arms Achilles wore.

TECM. Ah wretched me!

CHOR. This strong affliction pierces to thy heart.

TECM. Ah wretched, wretched me!

CHOR. I marvel not at thy repeated groans,
Lamenting the dear loss of such a friend.

TECM. Thou canst but think so, while I feel it deep.

CHOR. My thoughts assent to thine.

TECM. Alas my son,
What yokes of slavery go we now to bear
What eyes shall o'er us keep malignant watch!

CHOR. 'Midst these thy sorrows the unfeeling hearts
Of the Atridæ, and their ruthless deeds
Thou wailest: but the gods avert such ills

TECM. These things had not been thus, but by the gods.

CHOR. They sink thee with an heavy weight of woes.

TECM. The dreadful goddess, Pallas, sprung from Jove,
To grace Ulysses, gave these evils birth.

CHOR. With insolence this deep-designing Chief
Swells his dark mind; and at these ills, which sprung
From frenzy, jeers with many a bitter mock;
With him, (O grief!) these tidings heard, will join
The sons of Atreus, our imperial Chiefs.
TECM. And let them mock, in his calamities
Let them exult: the time perchance may come,
Though whilst he lived they lightly prized his worth,
They may lament him dead with many a groan,
And want him in the dreadful shock of war.
The impotent of mind, whilst in their hands
They hold a treasure, know not how to prize
Its worth, till from them it be snatch'd away.
To me his death brings sorrow, joy to them;
To him it was most pleasing so to die,
It was the consummation of his wish.
Have they then cause to triumph in his death?
No: by the gods he died, and not by them.
Then let Ulysses swell with pride, none now
Opposing. Ajax lives for them no more,
But in his death to me leaves woes and groans.
TEUC. Ah miserable me! [*not in sight.*
CHOR. Be silent; for methinks I hear the voice
Of Teucer, mournful for this ill its notes.

TEUCER, TECMESSA, CHORUS.

TEUC. O Ajax, O my brother, to my soul
Most dear, hast thou, as loudly fame reports,
With all thy virtues purchased this reward!
CHOR. O Teucer, thou must know it; he is dead.
TEUC. Ah, what a weight of misery is mine!
CHOR. Afflictions great as these.....
TEUC. Oh wretched me!
CHOR. Give ample cause for grief.

TEUC. Disastrous fate!
CHOR. Teucer, we feel its weight.
TEUC. Ill-fated man!
Where, in the realms of Troy where is his son?
CHOR. Alone within the tent.
TEUC. Go then with speed,
And bring him hither, lest some daring hand
With hostile force should seize him, like the whelp
Of a lone lioness. Go, spare no toil:
All will insult the dead, when low they lie.

TEUCER, CHORUS.

CHOR. Teucer, to thee, while yet he lived, this charge,
To which affection prompts thee now, he gave.
TEUC. Of all the sights, which e'er my eyes beheld,
Most mournful this; my feet ne'er trod a path
Which led to grief, that rends the heart, like this,
Through which, O dearest Ajax, of thy death
Soon as inform'd, I follow'd thee, and traced
Thy steps; for quick through all the Grecian camp
The rumour of thy dreadful fate was spread,
As of some god: I heard it with dismay,
And distant then groan'd deep; I see it now,
And sink oppress'd with misery. Go, remove
That robe, that all the ill these eyes may view.
Oh, what a sight of horror! What a deed
Of daring desperation! What a store
Of woes hast thou in death laid up for me!
For whither, to what people can I go,
In thy distress who gave thee not my aid?
Will Telamon, the father of us both,
With gentle looks and well-affection'd mind
Receive me, without thee? Will he do this,
Who never, e'en in prosperous fortune, wore

A pleasing smile? Much rather will he give
His rage full scope, and wound me with reproach,
That from a slave, the captive of his arms,
Base-born, through cowardice and abject fear,
Or with a villain's wiles, I have betray'd
Thee, my dear Ajax, to enjoy thy state
And rich possessions. Thus, to anger prompt
By nature, and through age now more severe,
He to high passions will give way, and urge
A charge against me I have not deserved:
Thus rated as a slave shall I be driven
An outcast from my country. This my doom
At Salamis: but on the coast of Troy
I shall find many enemies, but few
To favour me, and all this through thy death.
But how, ah wretched me! how shall I draw
Thy body from this sharp deep-piercing sword?
It vibrates in the ground. Unhappy man,
By whom art thou thus slaughter'd! Did thy thought
Conceive that e'er the fatal time would come
When Hector, though long dead, should work thy death?
Mark, by the gods, the fate of both the Chiefs:
Bound by the radiant belt, which Ajax gave,

L. 1024. The hilt was fix'd in the ground, so that he could not draw the sword from the body; the body must be raised over its point. He speaks in the act.

L. 1027. Non interrogantis hoc, sed, ense cognito, mirantis.

L. 1031. This is from Homer: after the single combat of these heroes, the gallant Hector says to Ajax, Iliad. vii. v. 363:

But let us, on this memorable day,
Exchange some gift, that Greece and Troy may say;
"Not hate, but glory, made these Chiefs contend,
"While each brave foe was in his soul a friend."
With that, a sword with stars of silver grac'd,
The baldric studded, and the sheath enchae'd,

Was Hector by the rolling chariot dragg'd
Till he expired; and Ajax by the sword,
The gift of Hector, falls and lies in blood.
Did not the Furies forge that slaughtering sword,
And hell's dread monarch, ruthless artist, frame
That belt? These things I deem, and all th' events
Befalling mortal man, are by the gods
Always assign'd. Is there whose mind dissents?
Let him enjoy his thoughts: but these are mine.

CHOR. Of this no more; but be thy thoughts employ'd
How to entomb this corse, and what reply
Thou soon wilt make: I see a foe, who comes
With rancorous malice to insult thy grief.

TEUC. Whom from the camp advancing dost thou see?

CHOR. The Spartan, in whose cause we sail'd to Troy.

TEUC. I see him near, now easy to be known.

MENELAUS, TEUCER, CHORUS.

MEN. Forbear; to thee I speak; remove not hence
That body; let it, as it is, remain.

TEUC. In such a mandate why thus waste thy words?

MEN. I will it, and so wills th' imperial Chief.

TEUC. But say, what cause canst thou for this assign?

MEN. Is there not cause? From Salamis we hoped
That we should bring him an ally to Greece,
And faithful friend; but found him, put to proof,
More hostile than the Phrygians; for he plann'd
His bloody purpose to assault by night,
And spread destruction with his raging sword
Through all the army: and if this attempt
Some god had not defeated, we had found
The fate now fall'n on him; we had been slain,
In blood with horror roll'd, and he had lived.

He gave the Greek. The gen'rous Greek bestow'd
A radiant belt that rich with purple glow'd.

But now some god from us his hostile rage
Averted, on the flocks and herds to fall.
For this just cause there is no man that breathes
So potent as to entomb this corse with rites
Of sepulture; but on the weed-clad sand
To all the birds that scream along the shore
It shall be cast a prey. Nay, do not swell
With rude and boisterous arrogance: alive
If he disdain'd our pow'r, we will at least
Command him dead, nor ask thy leave, but force
Shall ratify our will; for whilst he lived
My mandates never would his pride obey.
It is the mark of a malignant mind,
When one, not raised above the common rank,
Scorns to obey his rulers. In a state
Never can laws be well enforced, where fear
Supports not their appointment; and an host
In arms o'erleaps the modest bounds of rule,
By fear and reverence to their Chiefs unawed.
And it behoves a man, though large his limbs
And vast his strength, to think that he may fall
E'en by a petty ill. But know thou this,
Where modesty and fear unite, they bring
Protection; but licentious arrogance,
That gives full sail to its intemperate will,
Shall sink the state, though proudly for awhile
She rides before a fair and favouring gale.
Fear then should know its place: nor let us think
That as our wild wills urge us if we act,
We shall not suffer just returns of ill:
These have their course alternate. In times past
H i insolence flamed high; I triumph now,
And charge thee not to inter him, lest perchance
Entombing him thou sink into the tomb.

CHOR. Do not, O king of Sparta, from thy lips
Whilst wisdom speaks its dictates, wrong the dead.
TEUC. No more, my friends, if one of low-born race
Acts basely, shall I marvel, since the great,
Who glory in their high-traced ancestry,
Thus merit censure for dishonest speech.
Didst thou not tune thy proem with these words,
(Speak them again) that thou didst bring this man
To Troy, received as an ally to Greece?
Did he not plough the deep, and join the war
Lord of himself? Where then thy pow'r o'er him?
What right hast thou as sovereign to command
The warlike troops he led, and was their Chief?
Thou camest the king of Sparta, not our lord.
The law of martial rule gave no command
To thee o'er him, more than to him o'er thee.
Subjection to superior pow'r is here
Thy duty, not to lead th' associate force
Of Greece, that thou o'er Ajax shou'dst bear sway.
Rule thy own vassals, and with high-swoln vaunts
Keep them in awe. Forbid it thou, or he
The other chieftain, him with hallow'd rites
I will entomb, nor fear thy empty threats.
Not for thy wife did Ajax join the war,
His was no mercenary spear; his oath
He held in reverence high, not thee, nor deign'd
To grace the worthless. Take then my resolve,
Bring all thy heralds, bring th' imperial Chief;
Not for thy clamours will I turn aside
From my intent. I know thee what thou art.
CHOR. Such words, around us whilst afflictions press,
Have not my approbation: they are harsh,
And, though to reason highly just, wound deep.
MEN. This archer bears, it seems, a lofty mind.

TEUC. Mine is no vulgar art.
MEN. How wou'dst thou vaunt,
If thou cou'dst bear a shield?
TEUC. Thy force in arms
Thus naked I defy.
MEN. Thy tongue is bold,
With pride o'erflowing.
TEUC. When the cause is just,
An honest pride may be indulged.
MEN. How just,
To honour him that slew me?
TEUC. Slew thee! Strange,
That dead thou yet shou'dst live.
MEN. The gods preserved
My life; he else had kill'd me.
TEUC. By their grace
Preserved, dishonour not the gods.
MEN. Their laws
What shows me prone to violate?
TEUC. Thy charge
Not to entomb the dead.
MEN. They were my foes.
My honour thus requires.
TEUC. 'Gainst thee a foe
Did Ajax ever lead?
MEN. I hated him,
He hated me: thou know'st this.
TEUC. In the votes
Thou wast found false and fraudulent.
MEN. That blame
Be theirs, who from the urns drew forth the lots,
Not mine.
TEUC. By stealth, and basely canst thou do
Many base deeds.

MEN. Those words shall cost hee dear.
TEUC. Not more perchance than we shall well repay.
MEN. In brief I say he shall not be entomb'd.
TEUC. Hear thou my answer, He shall be entomb'd.
MEN. Erewhile I saw a man of doughty tongue
Rating the mariners to hoist their sails,
While a storm threaten'd: but when danger rose,
Howling amidst the tempest, not a word
From that bold tongue was heard; wrapt in his cloke
He lay, and suffer'd every sailor's foot
At will to trample on him. So the force
Of an impetuous tempest bursting black
From a small cloud may in a moment check
Thee, and thy boisterous tongue, and all thy noise.
TEUC. And I once saw a man, with folly fraught
Insulting those around him when oppress'd
With ills. A man resembling me, and warm
With my free spirit, saw him, and rebuked
With words like these, Vain mortal to the dead
Offer no wrong; else, be assured, that wrong
Shall be repaid with vengeance. Thus he warn'd
The futile wretch. Methinks I see him: thou
Art he, no other. Speak I riddles now?
MEN. Ill it becomes me to rebuke with words
One whom my pow'r can force. I leave thee now.
TEUC. Go, get thee hence: to me it were a shame
To listen to a slight man's senseless words.

TEUCER, CHORUS.

CHOR. To outrage soon will this contention rise.
But haste thee, Teucer, with the utmost speed
Mark some fit place, within whose hallow'd mould
Thou may'st inter him, and a dreary tomb,
A monument to future ages, raise.
TEUC. And in meet time his son and wife approach

To deck the tomb of the unhappy dead.

TECMESSA, EURYSACES, TEUCER, CHORUS.

TEUC. Come hither, child, stand near, with suppliant hands
Touch him that gave thee birth: now take thy seat
Lowly beside his knees, and in thy hands
Hold thou my hair, and hers, and thine, the last
Sad gift of mourning suppliants. From the camp
By force should any drag thee from the dead,
May the wretch find a wretched death, and lie
In a strange land unburied, all his race
Cut off, as I cut off these locks. My child,
Take them, and keep them: let no ruffian force
Remove thee hence, but closely clasp the dead.
And stand not you like women round the corse,
But guard it well like men, till I return,
And bear him to the tomb, whoe'er oppose.

TECMESSA, EURYSACES, CHORUS.

CHORUS.

STRO. 1. When will the last revolving year
Of all this numerous train
Slow wandering in its course appear
'Midst ills I here sustain?
Toils rise on toils, and woes on woes,
The wasteful war around us glows,
And misery haunts this place.
The hateful walls of Troy around,
Unhappy Greece, what hast thou found,
But ruin and disgrace?

ANTIS. 1. Oh had he first been swept away
Through air by wild winds tost;
Or sunk from heav'n's ethereal ray
To Pluto's dreary coast;

Who train'd the Grecians to the field,
Taught them the sword, the spear to wield,
And steel'd the gentle mind !
Hence toil gives birth to toil again,
Hence carnage stains th' ensanguin'd plain,
For he destroy'd mankind.

STRO. 2. Nor the brow with chaplets bound
Breathing balmy odours round,
Nor the social glow of soul
Kindling o'er the generous bowl,
Nor the dulcet strain that rings
Jocond from the sounding strings,
Nor endearing love's delight
That with rapture fills the night,
Me will he permit to prove;
He, alas ! hath murder'd love.
But neglected here I lie
Open to th' inclement sky;
And my rough and matted hair
Drinks the dews of night's moist air,
Memorials sad of Troy !

ANTIS. 2. Yet, till now, when pale affright
Roll'd her hideous form through night,
Great in arms, his shield t' oppose,
Ajax as my rampire rose,
And my terror was no more.
Now the hero I deplore
To the gloomy god consign'd;
Now what joy can touch my mind ?
Oh that on the pine-clad brow
Dark'ning o'er the sea below,
Where the cliffs of Sunium rise,
Rocky bulwarks, to the skies,
I were placed; with sweet address

Sacred Athens would I bless,
And feel a social joy!

TEUCER, TECMESSA, EURYSACES, CHORUS.

TEUC. I saw th' imperial Chief with haughty step
Advancing, therefore hasten'd my return.
Expect a torrent of opprobrious words.

AGAMEMNON, TEUCER, &c.

AGAM. Thee to burst forth in rude contemptuous speech
Against us, by our vengeance not chastised,
Thee doth this daring insolence become,
Sprung from a slave the captive of the spear?
Had she, who gave thee birth, been high in rank,
How proudly wou'dst thou vaunt, and rear thy crest,
Since, nothing as thou art, for one who now
Is nothing, thou hast dared to scorn our rule,
Asserting that we came not o'er the host
Or fleet of Greece commanders, nor o'er thee;
And Ajax, such thy descant, plough'd the sea
Lord of himself. How shameful from a slave
To hear such arrogance? And what was he,
For whom these haughty clamours thou hast raised?
Whither did he advance, where fix his foot,
Where mine I fix'd not? In the Grecian camp
Was no man brave but he? Unpleasant fruit
The contest for the hero's arms proposed
Affords us, if by Teucer in each place
Proclaim'd unjust; and canker'd envy still
Basely repines to yield the honours due
To higher merit, where the general voice
Adjudged them; and with rude licentious tongue
You load me with reproaches, or with guile,
Your vain ambition frustrate, stab at me.

Were moods like these indulged, no law could stand
On a firm basis, if the right adjudged
We should reject, and in the highest rank
Place those to whom the lowest is assign'd.
But these things must be check'd. The high-built frame,
The massy-structured limb, the hardy nerve
Yield not protection: but the prudent mind
The conquest every where obtains. The ox,
Though vast his bulk, is taught the path prescribed
By a small whip: this discipline, I see,
Will soon reach thee, some prudence if thy mind
Acquire not, for a man that is no more,
But now a shade, thus daring to insult,
And pour the torrent of opprobious speech.
Wilt thou ne'er feel the curb of modesty?
Ne'er know the baseness of thy birth, and bring
Some one of generous blood to speak for thee?
No meaning to my ears thy words convey;
I understand not thy barbaric speech.

CHOR. Oh that your minds to gentler thoughts were calm'd!
My soul can form no better wish for each.

TEUC. Ah me, how soon the memory of the dead
Fades from the faithless mind, and is effaced,
Thee, Ajax, in his favour, e'en in things
To him of little import, since this man
No longer holds! Yet oft hast thou exposed
Thy life for him with toil in bloody fields.
But all these things are vanish'd, and have left
No trace behind. Thy tongue abounds with words,
Vain-talker! but is all remembrance lost?
Can'st thou forget, within your works enclosed,
When all was rout, confusion, and dismay,
Alone he came, he saved you? When the flames
Blazed on your lofty decks, when o'er the trench

Hector had leap'd, and on your navy roll'd
The thunder of the war, who check'd his force?
Was not the glorious action his, who ne'er,
Thou say'st, advanced his foot? Did not for you
His valour these heroic deeds achieve?
Nay more, 'gainst Hector shield to shield opposed
He stood in dreadful fight, by choice, not chance;
No coward lot into the 'midst he threw,
No clod of moisten'd earth; but with light bound
What from the crested helmet first would leap.
These were his noble deeds: with him I stood,
This slave, from a barbaric mother born.
What was thy view in this unhappy taunt?
Thy father's father, Pelops of old times,
Was a barbaric Phrygian: know'st thou this?
Know'st thou that Atreus was thy sire, of men
Most impious, to his brother at a feast
Who served up his own sons. From Crete her birth
Thy mother drew; and when thy father found
His bed polluted with adulterous lust,
He cast her to the monsters of the main.
From such art thou descended; and my birth
Darest thou revile, from Telamon derived,
My father, whose illustrious deeds in arms
Shone with the brightest splendor, and obtain'd
My mother to his bed, of royal blood,
The daughter of Laomedon, the prize
Of highest honour by Alcides giv'n?
Thus noble, and from noble parents sprung,
Should I dishonour those whose blood I share,
Whom thou, thus miserably fall'n, wou'dst cast

L. 1327. See the Electra of Euripides, l. 786.
L. 1334. Hesione, sister of Priam.

Unburied forth? Nor dost thou blush, this threat
Denouncing. But of this be thou assured,
Him if your violence cast forth, us three
Shall it cast forth together with him laid.
To me more glorious 'midst this honest toil
I deem it in a brother's cause to die,
Than for thy wife, or for thy brother's. Go,
Of me regardless, yet regard thyself:
Me if thou wrong, thou shalt have cause to wish
That coward fear had check'd thy daring pride.

ULYSSES, AGAMEMNON, TEUCER, TECMESSA, EURYSACES, CHORUS.

CHOR. In happy hour, Ulysses, art thou come,
If not to heighten, but allay this strife.

ULYS. Soldiers, what strife? for our imperial chief
Loud o'er this brave man's corse I heard from far.

AGAM. E'en now, O king Ulysses, from this man
The basest language of reproach I heard.

ULYS. Reproach! I blame not him who, when reviled,
Retorts indignant the ungracious words.

AGAM. Him I rebuked for his base deeds to me.

ULYS. What hath he done to merit such rebuke?

AGAM. He will not suffer, he declares, this corse
To lie unhonour'd with sepulchral rites,
But will entomb it, and defies my pow'r.

ULYS. Is then a friend allow'd to speak the truth,
The former bond of concord yet preserved?

AGAM. Speak; I were else unwise: for thee I deem
Of all the Grecians most my faithful friend.

ULYS. Then hear me. By the gods, remorseless thus
Form not the thought to cast this body forth
Unburied; nor let violence transport
Thy soul so far to hate, as under foot

To trample justice. Once he was to me
Of all the camp most hostile, from the time
I triumph'd in the contest for the arms
Of lost Achilles: yet, though such his mind
To me averse, I would not wrong his worth,
Refusing to his valour this just praise,
That him, of all the Grecian chiefs who march'd
To Troy, I saw the bravest in the field,
Except Achilles. Such a man by thee
Unjustly were dishonour'd: not to him,
But to the gods, and to their sacred laws
This were offence. A brave man, when no more,
Though hated once, it is unjust to wrong.

AGAM. Dost thou, Ulysses, striving in his cause,
Oppose my will?

ULYS. I do. I hated him,
Whilst honour bade me hate him.

AGAM. O'er his corse
Shou'dst thou not triumph?

ULYS. In ungenerous joys
Exult not, son of Atreus.

AGAM. Not with ease
Is a king pious.

ULYS. Well-advising friends
He may hold high in honour.

AGAM. Regal pow'r
A good man should obey.

ULYS. Forbear: for thine
The conquest, when thou yieldest to thy friends.

AGAM. Remember what a man it is thy wish
To honour thus.

ULYS. He was indeed my foe,
But once most brave.

AGAM. What woud'st thou? Why this zeal,

This reverence for the hated dead?

ULYS. With me
O'er hatred virtue triumphs.

AGAM. By mankind
Such are deem'd spiritless.

ULYS. Our friends we find
Oft changed to bitter foes.

AGAM. To gain such friends
Wouldst thou feel pleasure?

ULYS. The obdurate mind
Gives me no pleasure.

AGAM. This day thou wilt show
Our souls subdued by fear.

ULYS. No: to all Greece
I show your justice.

AGAM. Wou'dst thou that I grant
This corse to be entomb'd?

ULYS. Such is my wish:
For to the tomb I must descend.

AGAM. All act
That for themselves like grace they may receive.

ULYS. Who than myself hath juster right to gain
Advantage from my toils?

AGAM. This shall be call'd
Thy deed, not mine.

ULYS. But thine shall be the praise.

AGAM. To thee, be thou assured, a greater grace
With pleasure I would yield; but him, or cast
Unburied forth, or in the earth entomb'd,
My hatred ever will pursue. Do thou,
Thou hast my leave, what most thy soul approves.

ULYSSES, TEUCER, TECMESSA, EURYSACES, CHORUS.

CHOR. Whoe'er, Ulysses, holds thy wisdom cheap,

Such since thy generous spirit, is unwise.

ULYS. Now, Teucer, hear me speak my honest thoughts.
I was thy foe: henceforth I am thy friend;
And with thee wish to entomb the dead, t' share
Thy toils, and every solemn rite provide
From mortals due to grace the noblest dead.

TEUC. Thy words, Ulysses, claim my praise, my thanks;
They show a noble nature, far beyond
My expectation. In the Grecian camp
None was, like thee, his foe; yet thou alone
Hast spirit to protect him, and oppose
With high disdain all insult to the dead;
Whilst with wild outrage frentic came the Chief,
He and his brother, with malignant will
To cast him out unhonour'd with a tomb.
For this may the almighty sire enthroned
On this Olympus, may Erinnys still
Mindful of wrongs, and Justice that effects,
Though late, her solemn purpose, on their heads
Inflict disgraceful vengeance, as they wish'd
To cast him out, unworthily disgraced,
Deprived of sepulture. Thy offer'd aid,
Son of Laertes, in these funeral rites
I fear, the dead revering, to accept,
Lest it offend his shade. In all besides
Assist us. From the camp if thou wilt send
Others to grace the dead, it will not grieve
My mind. These obsequies let me prepare;
And know thy goodness hath my warm applause.

ULYS. It was my wish to aid thee in these rites;
But since not pleasing to thy heart my aid,
I leave thee, and thy pious plea approve.

TEUC. Enough: already hath too much of time

Been wasted. Some prepare the hollow'd earth;
Some for the pure ablutions o'er the flames
Place the tall tripod; let one social band
Bring from the tent the hero's radiant arms.
And thou, my child, with filial reverence touch
Thy father; raise thou with what strength thou hast,
With me, his sides, for from his veins yet warm
Spouts the black blood; let each man present here,
Who feels the glow of friendship, rouse his zeal,
Attend and toil in honour of the dead,
Once great in every virtue; whilst he lived,
No mortal with superior lustre shone.

CHOR. Mortals from what they see their knowledge gain;
But ere he sees, no prophet's piercing mind
The dark events of future fate can know.

PHILOCTETES.

PHILOCTETES.

PHILOCTETES, the friend and companion of Hercules, to whom that hero at his death consigned his invincible bow and arrows, joined the Grecian armament against Troy with seven ships. In their passage the fleet anchored at Chryse, a little island in the Ægean sea; as Philoctetes was there searching for an Altar on which Hercules, in his expedition against Troy, had sacrificed, he was wounded in the foot by the envenomed bite of a serpent; the consequence of which was a putrid and incurable ulcer; this became very offensive, and its anguish forced from the unhappy sufferer cries and imprecations which disturbed their sacrifices. The fleet proceeded to Lemnos; on that wild and uninhabited coast Ulysses and Diomede, by the command of Agamemnon and Menelaus, barbarously exposed him while he slept, and continued there course without him. There he supported his miserable life till the tenth year of the war; Helenus then announced the decrees of fate to the Grecian Chiefs, that Troy could not be subdued till Philoc-

tetes should appear before it with the bow and arrows of Hercules. Ulysses voluntarily engaged to bring the exposed warrior and his fatal arms to the Grecian camp, and took Neoptolemus with him as his associate in this expedition. The drama opens with their arrival at Lemnos; and their attempts to carry Philoctetes to Troy constitute its action. From this simplicity of subject the genius of Sophocles has formed the most beautiful, the most tender, and the most interesting scenes; there is not a more pleasing drama among all the remains of the Athenian theatre, nor one that touches the heart with purer sensibility. The character of Ulysses is finely supported; always called forth where superior wisdom is required, he is prudent, calm, and versatile; he maintains the dignity of the hero, even while he descends to artifice and fraud; for his own private interest is never the object of his attention, but he always exerts himself with unremitting vigour in obedience to his commanders, and in the service of his country. In contrast with this cool unfeeling veteran stands the young, the generous, the amiable Neoptolemus, ambitious of the hero's glory, but averse to the stateman's fraud; this very desire of glory suffers him for a moment to be drawn aside from justice, contrary to the dictates of his noble nature; but he melts with pity at the sight of distress, is incapable of availing himself of his artifice even when it had attained its purpose; he repents, and gives his generosity its free

course, regardless of danger whilst honour directs his actions. Between these different characters stands the unhappy Philoctetes, the object of our pity and our wonder. An outcast from human converse, left for ten years in a desolate cave, unprovided with the necessaries of life, and tortured with his wound, we expect that his mind had contracted a ferociousness correspondent to the wildness of his figure. Amidst all his miseries he receives the strangers with courtesy; no misanthropy has soured his temper; once more to see the Grecian dress, once more to hear the language of his country, was highly pleasing to him; but to find himself addressed by the son of Achilles filled his soul with a transport of joy; sincere, warm, and unsuspecting, he falls into the snares laid for him; as soon as he perceives this, he breaks forth into the fiercest passions; then, sensible of his helpless condition, he becomes a suppliant; conscious of his worth, and indignant at the wrongs which he had received, he again pours forth the torrent of his rage; unmoved by the generosity of Neoptolemus, and deaf to his persuasions, his mind, though a little softened, remains inexorable.

The scene on this wild and rocky shore has such a connexion with the distresses of Philoctetes, and is so finely described in many parts of the drama, that any observations here on so singular a beauty would be ill-placed and improper.

PERSONS OF THE DRAMA.

ULYSSES

NEOPTOLEMUS

PHILOCTETES

HERCULES

ATTENDANTS

CHORUS OF MARINERS.

PHILOCTETES.

1—17

ULYSSES, NEOPTOLEMUS.

ULYS. THIS is the shore of Lemnos, sea-girt isle ;
No human footstep marks the ground : no hut,
Which man inhabits, rises to the eye :
Here, Neoptolemus, thou noble son
Of the most valiant of the Grecian Chiefs,
The Melian Philoctetes I exposed
In times long past, commanded by the kings
To do this deed ; for from his wounded foot
A rankling ulcer oozed, and undisturb'd
Nor victim nor libation could our hands
Present; through all the camp his dismal groans
And horrid cries resounded. But these things
Why should I now relate? This is no time
For long discourse, lest, my arrival known,
I frustrate all my subtle trains, in which
I think to take him soon. Thine now the task
To act as I direct thee, and observe

If here the pierced rock to the winter's sun
Presents on either side a cheerful seat;
But in the summer through the pervious cleft
The gently-passing gale leads sleep along.
A little lower, on the left, perchance
A fountain thou may'st see, of whose pure stream,
If living yet, he drinks: with silent step
Advance, and tell me in that place if still
He holds his habitation, or elsewhere.
Further instructions then thou may'st receive,
And I may give them: mutual be our toil.

NEOP. Not distant, king Ulysses, lies this task;
I think I see the cave by thee described.

ULYS. Above this place, or lower down? My eye
Discerns it not.

NEOP. Above; and many a trace
Of human steps.

ULYS. Observe if stretch'd in sleep
Haply he lie reposed.

NEOP. I view it round,
And not an human habitant is there.

ULYS. Contains it nothing which domestic use
Requires?

NEOP. An heap of leaves, that bear the mark
Of one who lodges on them.

ULYS. Nothing more,
Save this rude bed, beneath the rocky roof?

L. 32. Καὶ στίβου γ' οὐδεὶς τύπος, v. 29. Legi malim οὐχ εἷς, et vestigii non una nota, sed plurimæ—Apud Heathium. As this cave had been the residence of Philoctetes for many years, it cannot be supposed that no mark of his footsteps was to be seen near it. At verse 48 Neoptolemus says, φυλάξεται στίβος: again at v. 164. he says, Στίβον ἀγμιαίαι τόνδε. Hence the reading of Mr. Heath's learned friend is well supported.

NEOP. A cup of wood by some rude artist wrought;
And * these, the sparks of sleeping fire to wake.
ULYS. His treasures, and to him of moment these.
NEOP. And drying here some noisome rags are laid,
Alas, alas, how full of putrid gore!
ULYS. These mark his habitation in this place;
Nor distant he; th' immedicable wound
Long rankling in his foot forbids him far
To roam; in search of food, or of some leaf,
He is gone forth; he knows perchance some herb
Lenient of pain. Be this attendant then
Sent to observe his steps, lest unawares
He light on me; for more than all the sons
Of Greece he wishes me within his pow'r.
NEOP. He goes; the path shall well be watch'd. Now say,
Resuming thy discourse, what wou'dst thou more?
ULYS. Son of Achilles, in th' important cause,
Which brought thee hither, it behoves thee much
Thy vigour to exert; nor that alone,
But if aught new, if aught unheard before
Thou hear, assist: for therefore art thou come.
NEOP. What then wou'dst thou command me?
ULYS. To allure
With fraudful words the unsuspecting heart
Of Philoctetes: when he asks thee who
And whence thou art, tell him thou art the son
Of great Achilles; fraud were useless here;
To Scyros say thy vessel ploughs the main,
And bears thee from th' associate Chiefs of Greece,
Indignant at thy wrongs; for when their pray'rs
Won thee to join their naval force (that hope
To storm the tow'rs of Troy alone remain'd)

* Δικτικῶς.

To thy request, though highly just, with scorn
The armour of Achilles they denied,
And gave it to Ulysses: then of me
Say what thou wilt, the vilest of vile things,
I heed it not. This task if thou decline,
Each Argive heart with sorrow thou wilt wound.
For should these fated arrows not be gain'd
It is not thine to waste the Dardan realms.
By me no converse with him can be held,
To thee it has no danger; it was thine
To join their arms, by oath to none engaged,
Nor through necessity, nor with the first
That stretch'd their sails: all this in me offends.
My ruin then, if whilst he holds this bow
He find me, is most certain; and on thee
My presence will draw ruin: this requires
Deep-thoughted stratagem, and artful trains,
By stealth to bear th' unconquer'd arms away.
I know thy noble nature; it disdains
To speak a falsehood, or contrive a fraud:
But high the transport to obtain the prize
Of conquest: dare th'attempt: we will be just
Hereafter: some small portion of this day
Forget to blush, and give thyself to me:
Thenceforth be deem'd the holiest of mankind.

NEOP. What but to hear is painful to my soul,
Son of Laertes, I abhor to act.
My nature was not form'd for treacherous deeds,

L. 81. This oath is related at large by Euripides, Iphigen. at Aulis, l. 55. All, who engaged in this war under the obligation of this oath, or compelled by the confederate princes, that is, all, who at first embarked with Agamemnon and Menelaus, were considered by Philoctetes as his enemies, in a conspiracy to expose him on that desert island. Neoptolemus was not of that number; he therefore had not offended the deserted Chief.

Nor his who gave me birth; so fame reports.
Thou seest me prompt to seize this man by force,
But not by fraud: nor will his might avail,
Prompt on one foot, against our vigorous strength.
Sent thy assistant, I disdain the name
Of a betrayer. I have a joy, O king,
In honest actions, though their efforts fail,
More than in victory by baseness gain'd.

ULYS. Thou noble son of an illustrious sire,
When I was young I bade my tongue be still,
And my hands active; now by certain proof
From long experience in the world I find
Thy tongue, not actions, rules th' affairs of men.

NEOP. What then wou'dst thou command, so that my tongue
Speak no untruth?

ULYS. I tell thee that by fraud
Thou must take Philoctetes.

NEOP. Why by fraud,
Rather than fair persuasion, should I hence
Assay to lead him?

ULYS. To persuasion's voice
He would be deaf, nor will thy force avail
To seize him.

NEOP. What hath he of power so vast,
So terrible?

ULYS. Unerring arrows wing'd
With certain death.

NEOP. Bold then must be th' attempt
E'en to accost him.

ULYS. Not if seized by fraud
As I advise.

NEOP. Dost thou not deem it base
To utter falsehoods?

ULYS. Not if falsehood leads

To safety.

NEOP. How must that man look, who dares
To speak such things?

ULYS. When much may be obtain'd
Such niceness may be waved.

NEOP. To me what gain,
Should he to Troy sail with us?

ULYS. By his shafts
Alone is Troy subdued.

NEOP. Did you not say
My arms should raze her tow'rs?

ULYS. Not without these,
Nor these unaided by thy arms.

NEOP. If thus
It be decreed, these arrows must be won.

ULYS. Win them, a double meed is thine.

NEOP. What meed?
This known, no more I may refuse to act.

ULYS. As wise and brave to hear thyself renown'd.

NEOP. Go: I will do it, and all shame defy.

ULYS. Are my instructions in thy mind well fix'd?

NEOP. Be sure of that, since I assent to them.

ULYS. Abide thou here expecting his return:
I now must leave thee, to avoid his sight,
And the attendant, who observes his steps,
Will order to the bark. If your delay
Exceeds my expectation, I will send
The same man back in such habiliments
As to appear the master of some bark,
That he may come not known in such a garb:
Artful and various thou wilt find his words;
But gather from them to the present cause
What is of highest import: to the ship
I go, these things committing to thy charge.

May Hermes, god of wiles, who led us forth,
Be now our guide, and the victorious queen,
Pallas, protectress of the rampired town,
Who always shields me with her guardian care!

NEOPTOLEMUS, CHORUS.

CHOR. In a strange land a stranger, potent lord,
What truths must I conceal, what may I speak,
When to our sight this man presents himself?
Instruct me, for in knowledge he excels
All others, and in prudence, who from Jove
Receives the sacred sceptre; all this pow'r
To thee, my son, is from a noble line
Of ancestors derived. Inform me then
What service from my hand is now required.

NEOP. Now, if thou hast a wish to see the place
Through all its deep recesses where he lies,
With freedom view it; but when he returns,
The painful traveller, quit these caves, be near
My hand, prepared to act as need requires.

CHOR. That was my purpose, with attentive heed
On thine, O king, to fix my eye. Now show
Amidst what caves he lodges, and what place
Inhabits: this to know is not unmeet,
Lest haply he surprise me in some part
Where not expected. Show me then his cave,
Show me his residence; his footsteps mark,
Homeward impress'd, or pointed from the cave.

NEOP. Thou seest his habitation in this cave,
Where the cleft rock a double entrance yields.

CHOR. Where absent is the wretched dweller now?

NEOP. The want of food hath doubtless drawn him forth
To toil with painful step, not distant far,
For he sustains his miserable life.

By miserably piercing with his shafts
The beasts that haunt these wilds; nor for his wound
Finds he a cure, or to his pains relief.

CHOR. I pity him, no mortal's lenient aid
Tending around him, and no social friend
Near him to sooth his solitary hours.
Alone, and with the anguish of his wound
For ever tortured, while each cheerless want
Daily scowls round him, how supports he life?
Alas, to what hard toils are mortal men
Reduced, whose lives, unhappy sufferers, want
What to sustain them! So this man, perchance
In noble blood and high-traced ancestry
Rank'd with the greatest, destitute of all
That life requires, alone 'midst shaggy beasts
And birds of various wing his lodging finds;
And pierced with pain and hunger here endures
Immedicable anguish, whilst around
The rock's rude Echo with unceasing voice
In sullen notes returns his dismal groans.

NEOP. My wonder this excites not; for heav'n-sent
These sufferings seized him, if aright I judge,
Derived from baleful Chryse; and the toils
Which now afflict him, where no friend is near
To mitigate his ills, are by the gods
Assign'd, who would not their unconquer'd shafts
He wing against the Trojans, ere the time
Arrive, when by them Troy must be subdued.

CHOR. Silence, my son; I hear a sound; it seems
The voice of one acquainted long with pain.

NEOP. From what part comes the sound? I hear it now:
This is indeed the voice of one that sets
His steps with pain: though distant, yet distinct
Is this heart-wasting voice, for loud his groans.

CHOR. Now summon all thy prudence, for his steps
Approach, are near; no charm of tuneful pipe
He brings like rural shepherd, but loud cries
Far distant heard, through anguish when his foot
The rugged path annoys; or as he sees
Our vessel in th' inhospitable port:
For dreadful are his cries before him sent.

PHILOCTETES, NEOPTOLEMUS, CHORUS.

PHIL. Strangers, who are you that have steer'd your bark
To this rude coast, which knows not friendly port,
Nor habitation? What your country say;
Of what race may I speak you? for your garb
Presents the modes of Greece, to me most dear.
I wish to hear your voice. Nay, do not look
With fear and horror at this savage form,
But pity me, a poor forsaken wretch,
Alone, and friendless, and oppress'd with ills.
Speak to me, if you come as friends, O speak;
This I should not refuse; refuse not you.

NEOP. Stranger, be first inform'd of this, for this
Was thy first wish to know, we are of Greece.

PHIL. O welcome accents! What a joy to hear
That language, to its sound so long disused!
Who brought thee hither? What necessity,
What strong desire impell'd thy sails, what wind
To me most dear? Speak to me, tell me all,
That who thou art undoubting I may know.

NEOP. My birth I draw from Scyros, sea-girt isle,
Thither my bark now steers its homeward course;
And Neoptolemus men call my name,
Son of Achilles. I have told thee all.

PHIL. Son of a father to my soul most dear,

Thou native of a land I love, thou joy
Of aged Lycomedes, to these shores
On what achievement bound? Whence sail'd thy bark?

NEOP. From Ilium now I steer my willing course.

PHIL. What say'st thou? Not with us didst thou embark,
When first 'gainst Ilium sail'd our warlike host.

NEOP. Hadst thou too in that martial toil a share?

PHIL. Know'st thou not me, my son, whom now thou seest?

NEOP. How should I know a man not seen before?

PHIL. Hath not my name, hath not the bruit of ills
By which I perish, ever reach'd thine ear?

NEOP. Nothing of these thy questions do I know.

PHIL. Oh what a wretch am I, and to the gods
How hateful, that no tidings of my woes
Have reach'd my house, nor any realm of Greece!
While they whose impious arts exposed me here,
Deride me, and conceal the barbarous deed,
My wound still rankling, and my pains more fierce.
Know then, thou son of an illustrious sire,
Son of Achilles, I am he, whose name
Widely divulged perchance hath reach'd thine ears,
Lord of the arms of Hercules, the son
Of Pœas, Philoctetes; whom the Chiefs,
And Cephallene's king, here basely left
An outcast, and alone, with dire disease
Consumed, and tortured with this gnawing wound
By the fell serpent's venom'd tooth impress'd.
In this ill plight they left me here alone,
From Chryse when on this wild coast we touch'd.
As wearied with the tossing of the waves
They saw me sleeping on the shore, beneath

L. 248. Lycomedes, king of Scyros, was father of Deidamia the mother of Neoptolemus. See the Achilleid of Statius.

This rock's rude covering, with malignant joy
They left me, and sail'd hence, a few mean rags,
Meet for a wretch like me, beside me laid,
And food, a scanty pittance; such be theirs!
Think from that sleep, my son, how I awoke
When they were gone; think on my tears, my groans,
Such ills lamenting, when I saw my ships,
With which I hither sail'd, all out at sea,
And steering hence; no mortal in the place,
Not one to succour me, not one to lend
His lenient hand to mitigate my wound.
On every side I roll'd my eyes, and saw
Nothing but wretchedness; of that enough.
Time after time roll'd on; this narrow cave
I made my mansion, and these hands alone
Supplied my wants; my bow procured me food,
Piercing the doves on wing; beneath my shafts
Whene'er they fell, I trail'd my foot along
In anguish; so when thirst compell'd me forth,
Or the inclement winter's piercing frost
To break a few dry sticks, out crawl'd this wretch
Devising shifts: fire was not here; I struck
Flint against flint, and raised the latent sparks
With pain: thus cherish'd life hath been preserved.
This sheltering mansion, with such cheering fire,
Hath furnish'd me with all things, but a cure
To my disease. Now learn from me the state
Of this rude isle: no mariner through choice
Adventures on this coast; for no safe port,
Receives his bark, no mart is open here
For traffic, and no hospitable door
To give him welcome; to these shores his course
No wise man steers; some in a length of time,
Which rolls along events surpassing thought,

Have been driv'n hither; these, my son, when here,
In words have pitied me: nay, they have giv'n,
Touch'd with compassion, some small share of food,
Some raiment; but entreaties all were vain,
Not one, though oft I urged the fond request,
Would bear me to my household gods, and save
This life; the tenth sad year now rolls its course,
Since here with wretchedness and famine pierced
I waste away, and feed my rankling wound.
These wrongs from the Atridæ I sustain,
And from Ulysses, whose unfeeling heart
Ne'er knew the touch of pity: on their heads
May the just gods pour miseries great as mine!

CHOR. Like others, who have visited this isle,
I too, O son of Pœas, pity thee.

NEOP. I can bear witness to thy words, by proof
I know them true: Ulysses I have found
Unfeeling, and the sons of Atreus base.

PHIL. Hast thou too suffer'd from them? Is thy rage
'Gainst their destructive guilt, like mine, inflamed?

NEOP. Oh that my hand had pow'r t' avenge my wrongs!
Then should Mycenæ and proud Sparta know
And feel that Scyros to the brave gives birth.

PHIL. This shows a noble spirit: but, my son,
What mighty wrongs to Lemnos urged thy sails?

NEOP. I will inform thee, if my soul can bear
To speak my wrongs; for since Achilles died.....

PHIL. Ah, let me check thy speech: of this event
First tell me. Is the son of Peleus dead?

NEOP. And by no mortal hand, but by the bow
Of Phœbus, such the voice of fame, subdued.

PHIL. Illustrious he that slew, and he that fell!
But what behoves me now? Should I first ask
What thou hast suffer'd, or lament his fate?

NEOP. Griefs of thy own, I think thou hast enough,
Unhappy man, unmix'd with foreign ills.
PHIL. Thy words are wise: return then to thy tale,
My son, and say what wrongs thou hast received.
NEOP. In a tall bark with all her sails unfurl'd
The great Ulysses, and the sage who train'd
May father's youth, came to me, and declared
(The truth yet doubtful) that, my father dead,
No arm but mine could raze the tow'rs of Troy.
I heard them, nor detain'd them long, but soon
Mounted the bark; for ardent my desire
To see the dead, whom I had never seen,
Ere in the earth entomb'd: their plea besides
Had honour in it, that the tow'rs of Troy
Should, if I join'd them, fall beneath my arm.
One day our vessel plough'd the foaming main,
And on the second with a favouring gale
I reach'd Sigæum, scene of bitter woe.
Soon as I landed, all the army round
Enclosing me with salutations greet,
And swear they see Achilles, now no more,
Living again; but he was stretch'd in death.
O'er him in all the anguish of my grief
I shed the pious tears; nor mourn'd him long,
But hasted to th' Atridæ, as my friends,
For such I deem'd them, and my father's arms
Demanded, and besides whate'er was his.
In words that pierced my heart they thus replied,
Son of Achilles, thine be all the stores,
The treasures of thy father, save his arms;
Of these another now is lord, the son
Of old Laertes. Strait the swelling tear
Burst from my eye; and roused to ardent rage
Indignant I replied, Have you then dared,

Injurious men, to give my arms away,
My leave not ask'd? Ulysses, who was nigh,
Address'd me thus, To me, young man, these arms
With justice they have giv'n, for from the foe
I saved them, and their slaughter'd lord. Incensed
I pour'd a torrent of reproachful words
Against him, should he bear my arms away.
Stung with my words, though train'd to curb his rage,
Thus far to rising passion he gave way,
Thou wast not where we were, but distant far
From danger and from glory: but these arms,
Since in so high a strain thy tongue breaks loose,
To Scyros sailing never shalt thou bear.
Thus slighted, thus insulted, of my right
Robb'd by the vile Ulysses, of a race
As vile descended, I to Scyros steer
My homeward course; yet less with him enraged
Than with the potent kings; for every state,
And every army from their Chiefs are form'd.
And they, who mock at honour's dictates, learn
Their baseness from their lords. Thou hast heard all:
But know, whoe'er the sons of Atreus hates,
Must be to me, and to the gods, most dear.

CHOR. Thou all-sustaining parent, mighty queen,
Delighting in the mountain's wood-crown'd height,
Mother of Jove, who feed'st the golden stream
Of rich Pactolus, pow'r revered, to thee
My vows I then address'd, when all these wrongs

L. 384. Me miserum, quanto cogor meminisse delore
Temporis illius, quo Graiûm murus Achilles
Procubuit! Nec me lachrymæ, luctusve, timorve
Tardarunt, quin corpus humo sublime referrem.
His humeris, his, inquam, humeris ego corpus Achillis,
Et simul arma tuli....Ovid. Met. lib. xiii.

Burst from the sons of Atreus, when they gave
His father's arms (O thou, whose car sublime,
Blest as thou art, bull-rending lions draw !)
To grace Ulysses, an illustrious prize.

PHIL. With marks of grief imprinted deep, I ween,
Strangers, to me you steer'd your course, with mine
Your voice according ; for, with me, the sons
Of Atreus, and Ulysses you have felt :
These are their deeds : I know him well; his tongue
To subtile blandishment and wicked guile
Is always smooth'd, whence nothing just was e'er
Brought to effect. I marvel not at this,
But much, if this the greater Ajax saw,
How his high soul such deeds of baseness brook'd.

NEOP. He, stranger, was no more; for had he lived,
I had not of my arms been plunder'd thus.

PHIL. Dead, say'st thou ? Is the noble Ajax dead ?

NEOP. No more he views the sun's ethereal light.

PHIL. I mourn his fate. But tell me lives the son
Of Tydeus ? Lives that wretch, who ere his birth
By Sisyphus was to Laertes sold ?
Are not they dead ? Such wretches should not live.

NEOP. No: be thou well assured of that : they live,
And flourish now amidst the Argive host.

PHIL. Where is my honour'd good, and aged friend,
The Pylian Nestor ? Well his sage advice
The baseness of their actions might have curb'd.

NEOP. He lives indeed, but sinks beneath his grief,
Mourning Antilochus, his loved, lost son.

PHIL. Twice have thy words with sorrow pierced my heart,
To hear, what least I wish'd to hear, the death,

L. 427. This dark scandal is differently related. Laertes is said to have carried off Antielea the wife of Sisyphus when she was pregnant with Ulysses, and to have made compensation to the injured husband with large treasures.

Of two brave friends. Ah, what must be our thought,
When such men perish, and Ulysses lives,
Whose death, instead of theirs, should be announced!

NEOP. He is a wary combatant; but craft
Is oft entangled in the nets it spreads.

PHIL. Now, by the gods inform me where was then
Patroclus, to thy father once most dear?

NEOP. He too was dead. In one brief sentence hear
This truth, that never willingly doth war
Cut off the base, and never spares the brave.

PHIL. To show thee that my thoughts accord with thine,
Now let me ask thee of a worthless man,
But passing shrewd, and voluble of tongue.

NEOP. Of other than Ulysses dost thou speak?

PHIL. I meant not him: but in the Grecian camp
Was one Thersites, who wish'd oft to speak
What no man would hear once: is he alive?

NEOP. I saw him not, but heard that yet he lives.

PHIL. Yes, he will live; for never have I known
That the base perish; such the gods protect,
Delighting from the realms of death to snatch
The crafty and the guileful; but the just
And generous they in ruin always sink.
How for these things shall we account, or how
Approve them? When I find the gods unjust,
How can I praise their heavenly governance?

NEOP. Son of Œtæan Pœas, I will guard
My future life from Ilium distant far,
Far from the sons of Atreus. O'er the brave
Where the vile lords it, and illustrious worth
Is doom'd to perish by oppressive pow'r,
I with such men will never live a friend.
But me the rocks of Scyros shall henceforth
Content, not undelighted with my home.

Now to my bark I go: farewell, thou son
Of Pœas; be each blessing thine, farewell;
May the gods heal thy wound! We must go hence,
That when the gale springs favouring we may sail.

PHIL. Would you now spread your sails, my son?

NEOP. The time
Now calls us near the bark to watch the gale.

PHIL. Now by thy father's honour'd shade, my son,
And by thy mother, by whate'er thy house
Holds dear to thee, thy suppliant I implore
Thy pity, do not leave me thus alone,
Abandon'd in these ills, which now thou seest,
And with which thou hast heard I long have had
My dwelling here. Receive me in thy bark,
Allow me there a place; this freight, I know,
Will be offensive; yet disdain it not.
Whate'er is base the noble mind abhors,
But glories in the kind and generous deed.
Not to perform this kindness were reproach
To thee, and shame; but granting my request,
High honour waits thee. If I reach alive
The land of Œta, I shall burden thee
Not one whole day; refuse not my request;
Throw me where'er thou wilt, into the hold,
The prow, the stern, where least I may annoy
The mariners; assent, my son, by Jove
Protector of the suppliant, grant my pray'r.
Infirm, and lame, and wretched as I am,
Low at thy knees I fall; forsake me not
Far from the haunt of men abandon'd thus;
But save me, bear me to thy friendly shore,
Or to Chalcodon's ports that deep indent
Eubœa; thence the passage is not long
To Œta, and to Trachin's rocky heights,

And to Sperchius, beauteous-rolling stream.
Show me to my loved father; yet long since
The tomb, I fear, received him; for to those,
Who reach'd this coast, I oft gave charge, and oft
Sent my request that he would speed a bark
To bear me hence in safety to my home.
But he is dead, or they perchance, (for this
Might be expected) on whose promised aid
I built my hopes, of my disastrous state
Made small account, and steer'd their onward course
To their own ports. But now I come to thee
To bear my message, nay, to bear me hence.
Save me, have pity on me; for thou seest
The dangers, and the horrible events
Attending mortals, prosperous now, anon
In misery sunk. Behoves it then the man,
A stranger now to ill, on ills to come
Forward to look; then most when fortune smiles,
To have a sense of man's uncertain state,
Lest ruin steal upon him, and he fall.

CHOR. Have pity on him, king; for he hath told
Of hard encounters with severest toils
Beyond man's sufferance: ne'er may one I love
Endure the like! And if, O king, thou hate
The stern Atridæ, I would turn their ill
To his great good; and since his wish is urged
So strongly, in my swift well-furnish'd bark
Convey him to his mansion, and avoid
The righteous vengeance of th' offended gods.

NEOP. Take heed lest now too gentle be thy mind,
But when, embark'd together, his disease
Long time annoys thee, other be thy thoughts.

CHOR. Never, oh never: nor shalt thou have cause
To charge my stedfast mind wtth such reproach.

NEOP. Nay, I should blush indeed, should I appear
Less prompt than thou with generous toil to aid
In his distress a stranger. We will sail,
If such thy judgment: let him come with speed;
My bark shall bear him hence, nor shall he find
Denial: may the gods direct our course
Safe to the shore on which we wish to land!

PHIL. O welcome day! Most courteous thou of men!
And you, ye friendly mariners, what thanks
Can I return you? With what words express
The gratitude that glows within my heart?
But let us go, my son, and pay within
A farewell greeting to this cheerless cave,
Dwelling unmeet for man; that thou may'st know
Where I have lived, and what I have sustain'd
With a firm heart: the sight alone, I think,
Horror on others must impress; but me
Necessity hath taught to love e'en this.

CHOR. Restrain your steps awhile: two men advance,
One to thy bark belongs, a stranger one.
First hear their tidings; visit then the cave.

MERCHANT, MARINER, NEOPTOLEMUS, PHILOCTETES, CHORUS.

MERC. Son of Achilles, to this mariner,
Who with two others guarded thy tall bark,
I made request that he would show me where
Thou might'st be found; since thus I light on thee
Where least expected, driv'n by chance to land

L. 546. There is a designed ambiguity here, as well as in the speech of the Chorus at l. 533. Neoptolemus means no other than the Sigæan shore.

L. 559. This stranger, this pretended Merchant of Peparethus, is the attendant whom Ulysses had promised to send back habited as the master of some bark, l. 143. His tale is artful indeed.

On the same shore; for I, as master, steer'd
My little galley homeward from the coast
Of Troy to Peparethus cloth'd with vines
Rich with the purple grape. But when I heard
That all thy naval train was waiting here,
I deem'd it meet in silence not to sail,
But first to tell thee things perchance to thee
Unknown, and much importing thee to know;
What late resolves the Grecian Chiefs have form'd
Against thee; not resolves alone, but acts
With vigour and without delay enforced.

NEOP. In grateful memory, stranger, I shall hold
Thy kind concern for me, else I were base.
What thou hast hinted speak at large, 'gainst me
The councils by the Grecians lately form'd.

MERC. The sons of Theseus, and the aged Chief,
Phœnix, pursue thee with a well-arm'd fleet.

NEOP. By force to lead me back, or suasive words?

MERC. I know not: what I heard I came to speak.

NEOP. Doth Phœnix this, and they who with him sail,
Obsequious to th' Atridæ's royal will?

MERC. Be thou assured they speed without delay.

NEOP. Whence is it that Ulysses came not, prompt
To sail with them? Hath fear restrain'd his zeal?

MERC. He and the son of Tydeus, when I sail'd,
Against some other plough'd the foaming main.

NEOP. On what adventure was Ulysses bound?

MERC. There was a man.....But tell me, who is this?
I would first know: but speak it not aloud.

NEOP. This, friend, is Philoctetes the renown'd.

MERC. Nay then no further question: with all speed
Hoist every sail, and hie thee from this land.

NEOP. What says this merchant? What design, my son,

L. 568. Peparethus is a little island not far from Lemnos.

'Gainst me conveys that whisper to thy ear?

NEOP. What he would say I know not; let him speak
Clear and aloud to thee, and me, and these.

MERC. Son of Achilles, to the Grecian host
Betray me not, as what I should conceal
Disclosing; many favours at their hands
Have I received for services by me
To them perform'd, such as a poor man may.

NEOP. I hate the sons of Atreus; and this man,
Because he hates them, is my dearest friend.
Behoves thee, since to me thou comest a friend,
Nought, which a friend can tell us, to conceal.

MERC. See what thou dost.

NEOP. That long hath been my care.

MERC. On thee I charge the blame.

NEOP. Charge it, but speak.

MERC. Then I will speak. Against this man the son
Of Tydeus, and the stern Ulysses speed
Their sails; their purpose ratified by oath
By soft persuasion or compulsive force
To bring him back: this all the Grecians heard
Ulysses speak aloud; for bolder hope
Was his, and firm assurance of success.

NEOP. After such length of time what cause hath moved
The sons of Atreus to such anxious care
For one, an outcast, whom so long they left?
Whence this desire? Or have the gods by force
Impell'd them, thus avenging impious deeds?

MERC. Of this I will inform thee, things perchance
By thee not heard. There was a noble Seer,
The son of Priam, Helenus his name;
Him this dark plotter cursed by every tongue,
As in the night he prowling roved alone,
Ulysses seized, and brought his glorious prize

Bound to the Grecians: all the dark decrees
Of fate he open'd to them, and declared
That never should they raze the tow'rs of Troy,
Till by persuasion they should lead this man
From his lone dwelling in this rocky isle.
This when Ulysses heard the seer declare,
Instant he pledged his faith to lead him hence,
And show him to the Grecian camp: his hopes
Are warm to win his willing mind; if not,
He will recur to force; and for success
Hath pledged his head. Thou hast heard all: now haste,
Thou and whoe'er is dear to thee: be warn'd.

PHIL. What, hath this vile accurs'd deceiver sworn
To show me to the Grecians? Were I dead,
Then might persuasion bring me from the realms
Of Pluto, like his father, back to light.

MERC. I know not that. My bark demands me now.
May the best blessings of the gods be yours.

PHILOCTETES, NEOPTOLEMUS, CHORUS.

PHIL. Is not this strange? What, dares Ulysses hope
With soothing words to win me to embark
With him, and trail me through the Grecian camp
A spectacle! No: rather would I hear
The serpent, from whose venom'd tooth my foot
Received this wound. But he dares speak and act
Whate'er is base. I know that he will come;
Let us then hence; with all its broad expanse

L. 646. Sisyphus, when dying, charged his wife not to bury him; the lady obeyed his commands. In the infernal regions he accused her to Pluto as denying him funeral rites, and requested permission to return to life for one day to punish her for this impiety: the monarch of the dead was persuaded to grant his request. He returned to life, but perfidiously refused to descend again to the realms beneath. Scholiast.

Let the sea roll between his bark and us.
Let us begone: for well-timed speed (the toil
Surmounted) brings the calm of sweet repose.

NEOP. When from the shore the favouring gales arise,
Our sails shall catch them: they are adverse now.

PHIL. Fair is each gale that wafts the bark from ills.

NEOP. No: but to them the gale is adverse too.

PHIL. To daring pirates adverse is no wind,
With ruffian force when they can seize their spoil.

NEOP. Well; instant let us sail: but from thy cave
First bear what thou may'st need, or wish to take.

PHIL. There is, though small my stores, what I shall need.

NEOP. What is there which my bark can not supply?

PHIL. There is an herb, with which I oft assuage
My wound, and wholly mitigate its pain.

NEOP. Bring it. Aught else hast thou a wish to take?

PHIL. If of these shafts one carelessly be dropt,
I would not leave it to a casual lord.

NEOP. Is this the bow so famous through the world?

PHIL. It is: my hands no other deign to hold.

NEOP. Wilt thou indulge me with a nearer view,
To hold, to kiss it as a thing divine?

PHIL. This, and what else is mine, to thee, my son,
To gratify thy wish shall be allow'd.

NEOP. I wish it, so far wish it as thy will
Assents; if not, my wish shall be suppress'd.

PHIL. Thy words are pious; thou hast my consent,
Thou, who alone hast giv'n me to behold
The sun's bright beams, to see th' Otæan land,
My aged father, my loved friends; when sunk
Beneath my foes, to rise and triumph. Yes,
Thou hast my leave to touch it, to my hands
Again to give it, and to make thy boast
That for thy virtue thou of all mankind

Alone hast handled it: for friendly deeds
It was my prize; nor envy I my friend
To see, to touch it. He, whose grateful heart
Knows to requite a favour, is a friend
Of higher value than rich treasured stores.

NEOP. The cave now enter.

PHIL. I will lead thee on;
For my disease thy aiding hand desires.

CHORUS.

STRO. 1. Such miseries never did mine eyes behold;
But fame records from times of old
That when Ixion with ambitious love
Assay'd to stain the bed of Jove,
Seized by the Thunderer, on the whirling wheel
Enchain'd, such tortures he was doom'd to feel.
Else not the grief-assaulted ear,
Nor eye inured to scenes of woe,
Have known a fate like his severe:
Yet justice aims no vengeful blow;
His hands no deed of baseness stains,
And fraud his virtuous soul disdains.
Alone, exposed on this wild shore,
Hearing the billows round him roar,
I marvel how his mournful life he bore.

ANTIS. 1. In cheerless solitude these rocks among
With pain he dragg'd his steps along;
No social friend, no partner in his pains
Attentive hears while he complains,
From mutual anguish makes his mutual moan,
Re-echoes sigh for sigh, and groan for groan;
None, when his fierce envenom'd wound
Bursts ope, and spouts the boiling gore,
To cull the lenient herb is found

From bounteous nature's balmy store.
But (as a child, its nurse away,
With tottering foot attempts to stray)
Where best his food he may provide
His feebly-rolling steps are tried,
Oft as his soul-consuming pains subside.

STRO. 2. Him not the earth's rich fruits sustain,
Which from her sacred bounty rise;
Nor, food of men, the golden grain,
Which toil's inventive care supplies;
Nor aught, save birds that wing th' ethereal height,
If haply his swift shafts arrest their flight.
For ten long years no sparkling bowl
Cheer'd with the grape's rich juice his soul;
But where th' unruffled fount he saw,
He hasted from the joyless stream to draw.

ANTIS. 2. A noble youth he now hath found,
Who with his father's virtues glows;
By fortune now his patience crown'd,
He rises greater from his woes.
The bark shall waft him, after these sad hours,
To thy loved banks, Sperchius, where their bow'rs
The Melian Nymphs delight to twine;
Where Œta blazed with flames divine,
Whence glorious to the blest abodes
The hero rose a god among the gods.

NEOPTOLEMUS, PHILOCTETES, *returning from the cave;* CHORUS.

NEOP. Why this delay? Move onward. What the cause
Of this thy silence? Whence this deep dismay?

Philoctetes groans.

NEOP. What ill afflicts thee?

PHIL. Nothing great: go on.

NEOP. Wou'dst thou suppress the pain of thy disease?
PHIL. Oh, no; I now feel lighter.—O ye gods!
NEOP. Why with such groans dost thou invoke the gods?
PHIL. To save us with their kind and guardian pow'r.
He groans repeatedly.
NEOP. What may this be? Wilt thou not speak? Thus long
Why art thou silent? Piercing seems thy pain.
PHIL. Oh, this exceeds the pow'r of man to bear!
Nor from you longer can I hide my ill.
Oh, I am pierced, pierced through! Unhappy me!
I cannot bear these agonizing pains.
Repeated and violent groans.
Hast thou a sword, my son? Cut off my foot,
Quick, hew it off, nor spare this wretched life.
NEOP. What are these new and sudden ills, that cause
Such dreadful cries, and loud-lamenting groans?
PHIL. Know'st thou, my son...
NEOP. Know what?
PHIL. Know'st thou, my son...
NEOP. What wou'dst thou ask?
PHIL. I know not.
NEOP. How not know?
Philoctetes groans again.
NEOP. How dreadful the attack of thy disease!
PHIL. Dreadful indeed: words cannot speak its force.
But pity me.
NEOP. What wou'dst thou I should do?
PHIL. Be not astonish'd, nor abandon me.
At intervals, like ruffians keen to seize
Their prey, its cruel inroads it will make
Till it be sated.
NEOP. O unhappy man,
In all thy toils unhappy! Shall my hand
Support thee?

PHIL. No: I would not that: but take
The bow, which lately thou didst wish to touch,
And, till the pains, which pierce me now, abate,
Hold it, and guard it well; for when the force
Of this disease begins to be allay'd,
Sleep seizes me; till then I have no pause
From gnawing pain; permit me then to lie
In undisturb'd repose; and, should they come,
Mean while, I beg thee by th' immortal gods
Let not persuasion, force, or all their arts
Work thee to yield it to them; for thyself
And me thy suppliant else thou wilt destroy.

NEOP. In my attentive care confide; to none,
Save to thy hands and mine, shall it be giv'n.
Consign it to me: happy be the trust!

PHIL. Take it, my son; and be thy vows address'd
To Envy, that to thee it cause not toils,
Such as to me, and to its former lord.

NEOP. Grant this, ye gods! And may a favouring gale
Arise, and safely bear us to the land
Sought by our sails, and by the gods assign'd!

PHIL. These vows, my son, I fear thou hast address'd
Without effect; for the black blood again
Spouts from the bottom of my wound; I dread
Anguish unknown before. Unhappy me,
What torture this! It thrills, it darts along;
It is not to be borne. You see my state;
But fly not; leave me not abandon'd here.
Thou Cephallenian savage, might this pain
Pierce through thy breast, quite through! Ye brother kings,
Leaders of Greece, for such a length of time,
For me such anguish how had you sustain'd?
O death, O death, each day so oft invoked,
Canst thou ne'er come? My son, thou generous youth,

Oh take me, burn me in these whirling flames
Of Lemnos; which sad office for the son
Of Jove these hands refused not to perform,
These arms receiving as my meed. My son,
Why art thou silent? What employs thy thoughts?

NEOP. Long have I griev'd, and mourn'd thy painful ills.

PHIL. Let not that shake thy firmness; for these pains
Oft come thus keen, and soon are gone again.
But, I entreat thee, leave me not alone.

NEOP. Be confident; for thee we here will stay.

PHIL. And will you stay?

NEOP. Be thou assured we will.

PHIL. Ill it becomes me to require thy oath.

NEOP. To go without thee were an impious deed.

PHIL. Give me thy hand to ratify thy faith.

NEOP. I give it as a pledge that I will stay.

PHIL. There, let me there.....

NEOP. What say'st thou?

PHIL. There on high...

NEOP. This is distraction. Wherefore are thine eyes
Fix'd on that orb above?

PHIL. Off, let me go.

NEOP. Why should I let thee go?

PHIL. Unhand me, off.

NEOP. I cannot quit thee in this hapless state.

PHIL. You kill me if you touch me.

NEOP. To thyself
I leave thee.....Are thy spirits now more calm?

PHIL. O earth, receive me dying as I lie;
My ills will never let me rise again.

NEOP. Sleep soon will steal upon him: see, his head
Already he reclines; and all his limbs
Are bath'd with sweat; the black distended vein
Is burst, and from his foot out-wells the gore.

Let us allow him then, my friends, to rest
In quiet, soon as sleep shall close his eyes.

CHOR. O sleep, that know'st not care, that know'st not pain,
Come gently-breathing, sorrow-charming king:
Veil from his eyes this light, whose glaring beams
Unshaded now are spread: come, healing pow'r!—
The hour, my son, requires deliberate thought,
Thy purpose fix'd or changed: this is the hour
To charge us with thy mandates. What avails
Longer delay? Occasion hath a pow'r
Surpassing all the counsels of the wise.

NEOP. True, he hears nothing: but these arms in vain
We make our prize, without him if we sail;
For his the crown; he must be borne to Troy;
So will'd the god. How base to boast of deeds,
Which e'en with falsehood could not be achieved!

CHOR. These things, my son, the god will make his care.
But when to me thy mandates thou shalt give,
Low be thy voice; for sleep in the diseased
Is ever on the watch, nor seals the eyes.
What now is in thy pow'r with caution act,
And silence: if with *his* thy thoughts accord,
Thou know'st of whom I speak, thou seest his state,
Let prudence judge, unable to resist.
The gale, my son, the fav'ring gale now breathes;
He sees not, helpless as in night's dark hour
He lies, and sleep, which all his senses locks,
Aids the design; nor hand nor foot discharge
Their functions; but like one, for whom the tomb
Is open'd, see him stretched: this hath a voice
That calls us to the deed; to seize him now
Were easy; be the task to me assign'd:

L. 858. Ulysses is here meant; but the Chorus, distrusting the imperfect sleep of the sick man, speaks only in dark hints; this obscurity is intended.

Best is that toil on which no danger waits.

NEOP. Be silent, I command thee; of such thoughts
No more: he moves his eyes, and lifts his head.

PHIL. O light, whose cheerful beam my waking eyes
Revisits, much beyond my thought, my hope,
Thou show'st me with what faithful care my sleep
These strangers guarded. Never, O my son,
Could my fond wish conceive that thou wou'dst bear
With such soft pity to attend my ills,
And give me aid. Not so our worthy Chiefs,
The sons of Atreus; they disdain'd to bear
So tenderly: but all these things, my son,
(For noble is thy nature, and thy veins
Are rich with noble blood) my cries, the stench
Of my foul wound, thou hast esteem'd as nought.
Now, in this pause, this respite from my pain,
Let thy hand help me, raise me from the ground;
That when this weakness leaves me, to the bark
Together we may go, nor stay thy sails.

NEOP. With joy I see thee thus beyond my hope
Viewing the light, and breathing vital air,
Free from thy pains; for, added to those ills,
Thou hadst the semblance of a man that breathes
No more. Now rise; or these (if such thy will)
Shall bear thee, not repining at the toil,
Since they perceive it is thy will and mine.

PHIL. This claims my thanks. Now raise me, since thy mind
Prompts thee to give me aid. Let these stand off;
Nor be annoy'd with this offensive smell
Ere need requires; enough will they endure,
In the same bark with me when they abide.

NEOP. Of that no more; but raise thee, grasp my hand.

PHIL. Fear not: long use hath taught me how to raise
My limbs.

NEOP. Now, O my soul, how wilt thou now
Resolve to act!
PHIL. What mean these words, my son?
NEOP. Doubt and perplexity distract my mind.
PHIL. Doubt and perplexity! Oh, speak not thus.
NEOP. All their oppressing weight lies on me now.
PHIL. Doth then the horror of my noisome wound
Forbid thee to admit me to thy bark?
NEOP. All must be horror, when the generous heart
Forsakes its nature for unworthy deeds.
PHIL. Nor word nor deed unworthy thy high birth,
When thou givest suffering virtue aid, is thine.
NEOP. To be deem'd base——this long hath grieved my soul.
PHIL. Not base thy deeds; thy words excite my fears.
NEOP. Direct me, king of heav'n! I shall be found
Base, doubly base; concealing what good faith
Would not conceal, and speaking vile untruths.
PHIL. This man, if I conjecture right, will sail,
And basely leave me helpless and betray'd.
NEOP. I will not leave thee: but to bear thee hence
So as may wound thy heart, that gives me pain.
PHIL. What is thy purpose? Tell me, ease my doubts.
NEOP. I will hide nothing from thee. Thou must sail
To Troy, to the Atridæ, and their camp.
PHIL. Ah me, what say'st thou?
NEOP. Sigh not ere thou hear.
PHIL. What should I hear? What wilt thou do with me?
NEOP. First from these miseries save thee; then advance
With thee, and waste the hated fields of Troy.
PHIL. Is this indeed the purpose of thy soul?
NEOP. It is, by strong necessity impell'd:
Nor, hearing this, be thou inflamed with rage.
PHIL. I am undone, betray'd. Why, stranger, why
Hast thou thus wrong'd me? Give me back my bow.

NEOP. That cannot be; the kings must be obey'd;
So justice and the public good require.
PHIL. Thou wasting fire, thou every thing to sense
Most hideous, thou detested instrument
Of horrid villainy, what hast thou done?
How hast thou wrong'd me? How deceived me? Wretch,
Dost thou not blush to see me at thy knees
A suppliant? Thou hast robb'd me of my life,
Taking my bow. I pray thee give it back,
Restore it, I implore thee, O my son;
Ah, take not, by the gods that guard thy hearth,
Take not what yields my life support, away!
Unhappy me! He speaks not yet, but looks
As he would never part with it again.
Ye ports, ye cliffs projecting o'er the waves,
Ye herds of mountain-beasts, ye craggy rocks,
To you (none other have I to address)
To you, who oft have heard me, I complain
Of these my wrongs. He swore to me, this youth,
Son of Achilles, swore to bear me home;
To Troy he bears me: pledging his right hand
He took the sacred bow of Hercules,
And now detains it. To the Grecian host
Vaunting his prowess, as some manly might
He had subdued, he drags me hence by force;
Nor knows he that his conquest is obtain'd
O'er one long dead, the shadow of a smoke,
A flitting phantom. Had these nerves the strength
Which once they had, he would not triumph now;
Nor but by fraud this conquest hath he gain'd.
With falsehoods, wretched me! I am betray'd;
What can I do?...But give me back my bow;
Be thou again thyself. What dost thou say?
Still art thou silent? Ah, I am undone!

Thou double opening of my rock, again
I enter thee, but of my arms deprived,
The means of my subsistence, in thy cave
To waste away alone, nor winged bird
Nor mountain-beast with these my shafts to pierce,
But 'midst my woes to die, to be a feast
To those on whom I feasted, and a prey
To those on whom I prey'd, and recompense
Slaughter with slaughter: thus am I betray'd
By one, whose heart, I thought, ne'er harbour'd ill.
I will not curse thee yet, till I shall learn
If honour once more may thy purpose change:
If not, may ruin seize thee and base death!

CHOR. What thy commands? It now is thine, O king,
To speed thy sails, assenting to his words.

NEOP. I am not now first moved; my heart long since
Hath melted with compassion at his woes.

PHIL. Oh pity me, I beg thee by the gods,
Nor let thy fame be blacken'd with reproach,
That me with basest fraud thou hast deceived.

NEOP. How shall I act? Would I had never sail'd
From Scyros! This employment rends my heart.

PHIL. Thou art not base, but by base men impell'd
To shameful actions hither art thou come.
On them (such recompense is just) return
Their arts, and sail; but give me back my arms.

NEOP. What shall we do, my friends?

ULYSSES, NEOPTOLEMUS, PHILOCTETES, CHORUS.

ULYS. What wou'dst thou do,
Basest of men? Give me the bow; away.

PHIL. Ha! Who is this? Ulysses do I hear?

ULYS. Ay; and in me Ulysses dost thou see.

PHIL. Oh, I am sold, undone! This then was he,
Whose arts beguiled, and robb'd me of my arms.
ULYS. It was my deed, I own it, mine alone.
PHIL. My son, restore them; give me back my arms.
ULYS. That, were he willing, he shall never do;
But with them thou must go; or these by force
Shall bear thee hence.
PHIL. Bear me, audacious wretch,
Thou basest of base men, me shall they bear
By force?
ULYS. If willingly thou dost not go.
PHIL. Thou land of Lemnos, ye all-conquering flames
By Vulcan kindled, must I bear these wrongs?
And shall he drag me from your coasts by force?
ULYS. Know thou that Jove, dread sovereign of this isle,
Jove thus ordains: I execute his will.
PHIL. Thou wretch abhorr'd, what hast thou now devised,
Making the gods thy plea? Are the gods false?
ULYS. No; they are true, and point thee out this path.
PHIL. I will not go.
ULYS. Thou must, thou shalt obey.
PHIL. Unhappy me! What, am I then a slave?
ULYS. No; but a prince 'midst princes; and with such
Thy arms must conquer Troy, and raze her walls.
PHIL. No, though I hear must suffer every ill,
Never, whilst I have pow'r to climb this rock.
ULYS. What wou'dst thou do?
PHIL. Strait throw me from its height,
And with my blood distain the rocks beneath.
ULYS. Lay hold on him, nor let him have that pow'r.

L. 1008. The Volcanos of the island gave birth to this fable. It should have been observed before on l. 809. that the translation follows the correction of Brunck, who for *ἀναπαλουμίνῳ*, which distresses all the commentators, reads *ἀναπυπαλουμίνῳ*.

PHIL. Alas, ye hands, deprived of your loved bow,
What vile indignity do you sustain!
O thou, whose soul ne'er harbour'd generous thought,
Or upright purpose, how hast thou beguiled,
With what base arts ensnared me in thy toils,
Skulking behind this youth to me unknown,
Not meriting to share thy fraudful guilt,
But worthy of my love! He nothing knew,
He but performs his orders: see his brow
Clouded with grief for what he has misdone,
And I have suffer'd. But thy treacherous soul,
For ever peeping from its lurking-place,
Hath taught his noble nature 'gainst his will
To be expert in mischief; and, thou wretch,
My hands thus bound, thy purpose is declared
To drag me from this shore, on which long since
Thou didst expose me with unpitying heart
Friendless, abandon'd, out-cast, whilst alive
Rank'd with the dead. Perdition seize thee! Oft
Have I made this my pray'r; but to my pray'rs
The gods grant nothing that delights my soul.
To live is thine, and to exult; with grief
My heart is rent, that 'midst my various ills
I am by thee derided, and the Chiefs
The sons of Atreus, who command these things,
And thou art to their lordly will a slave.
Yet didst thou join their arms compell'd by force,
Thy wiles detected. Me, unhappy me,
The willing leader of sev'n gallant ships,
They with disgrace cast out; the guilty deed
Thou on their baseness chargest, they on thine.
Why lead me now away? Why drag me hence?
What cause impels you? I am nothing now,
To you for ten long years I have been dead.

Base and detested wretch, is not my foot
Now lame? Is not its stench offensive now?
How, if I mount the bark, will you present
Your victims, your libations to the gods?
This was thy plea to leave me on these rocks
An out-cast. May the vengeance of the gods
Pour ruin on you all who wrong'd this wretch,
If justice rules their thoughts; it does, it does,
I know it well; for never had your sails
Stretch'd o'er the ocean for a wretch like me,
But that remorse, heav'n-sent, hath pierced your hearts.
But, O my country, O ye gods who view
These things, avenge, avenge me on them all,
And pity me! Your pity I deserve.
Might I but see them perish, I should think
This burning wound would never pain me more.

CHOR. Fierce is his passion and his words are fierce;
He hath a soul that yields not to his woes.

ULYS. I could say much in answer to his speech,
Were this fit time: one word is now enough.
Such where the general cause of Greece requires,
Such I am found; but where the cause demands
The just and good, than me thou wilt not find
A man more pious. Nature prompts my wish
Always to be victorious, save o'er thee:
To thee I freely yield. Unbind his hands,
Touch him no more, permit him here to stay.
We shall not want thee, since these arms are ours.
Teucer is with us, in this art well skill'd;
Nor in this science will I yield to thee;
My hands can bend the bow, and aim the shaft:
What need of thee? Farewell, and tread the rocks
Of Lemnos: we must go: this prize perchance
Will give to me the glory thou shou'dst gain.

PHIL. What can I do? Ah helpless wretch! Shalt thou
Amidst the Grecians glory in my arms?
ULYS. No more reply: I hasten to the bark.
PHIL. Son of Achilles, wilt thou no more deign
To speak to me, but wilt thou leave me thus?
ULYS. Thou art too generous, look on him no more;
Away, lest all our fortune thou o'erthrow.
PHIL. And will you, friendly strangers, thus depart;
Will you forsake me, and not pity me?
CHOR. He is our lord, our galley he commands;
To thee whate'er he says, the same we say.
NEOP. I shall be censured as too apt to melt
With pity: nature so hath framed my heart.
Yet stay with him, if such his wish, stay here
Till all things are embark'd, and to the gods
We make our vows. Meantime perchance his mind
May take a softer temper. We two go;
And you with speed attend us at our call.

PHILOCTETES, CHORUS.

PHIL. Thou rocky cave, now warm with summer suns,
Now cold with winter's frosts, I shall not leave,
No, I shall never leave thee; e'en in death
Thou shalt be still my mansion. Poor abode,
Thou witness of my woes, what day by day
Will now betide me? Whence shall I derive
My food, or whence my soul-supporting hope?
Oh, might the whirlwinds through the howling air
Bear me aloft; their force were welcome now!
CHOR. These woes, ill-fated man, these woes by choice
Hast thou drawn on thee; by no other hand,
No foreign force art thou involved in ills.
A better fortune in thy reach was placed,
Hadst thou been wise: thou hast preferred the worse.

PHIL. I am a wretch, a wretch, oppress'd with woes;
And never, never from this hour with man
Shall have my dwelling, but shall perish here.
My food no more shall I procure, no more
Bend my strong bow, and pierce the flying birds;
For dark and treacherous words, that ever smooth
The tongue of fraud, have robbed me of my arms.
Oh, might I see the base betrayer rack'd
For such a length of time with pains like mine!

CHOR. This is the fate assign'd thee by the gods;
This is their work, not fraud by us devised.
Thy dire and hateful imprecations spare,
Spare them: to thee benevolent my heart;
Reject not thou our friendship with disdain.

PHIL. Now on the margin of the hoary deep
Laughing he sits, and poizes in his hands
My life's support, which none hath ever borne.
O my dear bow, from these unhappy hands
Wrested by force, if thou hast sense, how grieved
Dost thou behold the toils of Hercules
No more employ thee! Changed thy noble lord,
Thou seest a vile deceiver guide thy shafts;
Thou seest his hateful and detested arts
Hostile to me, and all the thousand wiles
Which to ensnare me he hath basely forged.

CHOR. What in a man is virtuous, justice wills

L. 1117. If by Πτωκάδες here the Harpies are meant, a passage in Homer will explain the word: speaking of the daughters of Pandarus he says, κούρας ἀνέλοντο Θύελλαι: this he afterwards expresses by κούρας Ἅρπυιαι ἀνηρείψαντο. See Odyss. xx. v. 66. et. 77. and the note to Fenton's translation. The same idea occurs in the Trachin. v. 970.

L. 1149. Obedience to the commands of their Chief is the character which the Chorus supports through this drama. They know that he was engaged, under the direction of Ulysses, in an expedition of the highest importance to the army: they are faithful to their prince and their country. They

We speak; nor while we speak it should thy tongue
A torrent of malignant envy pour.
Call'd forth from all the Chiefs of Greece our lord,
Guided by his wise councils, hath achieved
A charge of highest import to his friends.

PHIL. Ye winged birds, ye tribes of tawny beasts,
That o'er these rugged mountains roam, no more,
When from your coverts you come near me, fly:
These hands no more the forceful arrows bear,
(Such now is my ill fortune) but this place
Is now no more destructive, and by you
No longer to be fear'd; an happy change
For you: come, in your turn your hunger glut,
And gorge my spotted flesh; I soon shall leave
My life; for whence shall food be now supplied?
Who lives on air, deprived of strength'ning food,
Whate'er the life-sustaining earth affords?

CHOR. Now by the gods, if strangers thou revere,
Meet us with all benevolence; we come
Benevolent to thee: and know, know well
Thou hast the pow'r to fly this wretched state:
But to feed grief, to force a thousand woes
To dwell with us, denotes a mind unwise.

PHIL. Again, again hast thou recall'd the sense
Of my old grief, thou kindest of all those
That ever visited this drear abode.
Do not torment me, do not wound my heart...

commiserate the sufferings of Philoctetes, and wish to relieve them by taking him from his miserable abode in the desolate rock; his refusal to go with them they consider as malignant obstinacy; when he execrates the arts of Ulysses, they answer in his vindication, but instantly turn their praise to the patriotic virtue of their own Chief, and Ulysses is mentioned only incidentally, τοῦδ' ἰφημοσύνᾳ, by *his* wise councils; this is perfectly in character. We are sometimes offended at their duplicity and want of delicacy; but they could act no other part: the drama is so much the worse for it.

CHOR. Why wilt thou talk thus?
PHIL. Forming yet an hope
To lead me to the hated land of Troy.
CHOR. That I esteem thy best and wisest choice.
PHIL. No more of this: away, and leave me here.
CHOR. This thy command with pleasure I receive,
And willingly obey it. Let us go,
As we are order'd, to our vessel go.
PHIL. By Jove, that hears the suppliant, do not go!
CHOR. Learn moderation.
PHIL. By the gods I beg,
Stay, strangers, stay.
CHOR. Why these lamenting cries?
PHIL. Ah me, my fate, my fate! Ah wretched me!
O misery, misery! How shall I sustain
Henceforth the anguish of my wound, and live?
Come back, O strangers, come to me again.
CHOR. What wou'dst thou now? Already hast thou shown
The settled purpose of a wayward mind.
PHIL. Forgive a wretch that sinks beneath a storm
Of raging anguish, which distracts his sense.
CHOR. Go with us now: let our advice prevail.
PHIL. Oh never, never; know my fix'd resolve:
Not if the thunderer from the flaming sky
Hurl his red lightenings on me. Perish Troy,
And all that sit beneath its walls in arms,
All, whose hard hearts an outcast left me here.
But, generous strangers, grant me one request.
CHOR. And what is thy request?
PHIL. Give me a sword,
An axe, or any weapon of keen edge.
CHOR. What deed wou'dst thou attempt?
PHIL. I would hew off
My head, and all these wretched limbs. My mind

Calls me, it calls aloud.

CHOR. Calls thee to what?

PHIL. To seek my father.

CHOR. Seek thy father! Where?

PHIL. In the dark realms below; for he no more
Views heav'n's fair light. How, O my country, how
O city of my fathers, could I bear
To show you, wretched as I am, these ills,
Who left your sacred streams to aid the arms
Of hated Greece! Ah, I am nothing now.

CHOR. Hence to our bark we all long since had gone,
But that I saw Ulysses and our lord
This way advancing to us; they are nigh.

Philoctetes retires into the cave.

ULYSSES, NEOPTOLEMUS, CHORUS.

ULYS. Wilt thou not tell me why with eager pace
Thy steps so soon returning tread this path?

NEOP. To make atonement for my former deed
Of baseness.

ULYS. At thy words I stand amazed:
What was this deed of baseness?

NEOP. What with thee
Complying, and th' united host of Greece,
I have effected.

ULYS. What, that ill becomes
Thy honour, hast thou done?

NEOP. A deed of fraud,
And base deceit.

ULYS. 'Gainst whom? Ah, hast thou form'd
Some new design?

NEOP. Not new; but to the son
Of Pœas——

ULYS. What thy purpose? How thy words

Alarm my fears!

NEOP. The bow from him received
To him again——

ULYS. O Jove, what wilt thou say?
Thou wouldst not give it back?

NEOP. It was obtain'd
By baseness and injustice.

ULYS. Thou speak'st this
But in a sportive mood.

NEOP. If to speak truth
Be sportive.

ULYS. What means this? What hast thou said,
Son of Achilles?

NEOP. Hast thou then a wish
That twice I speak these words?

ULYS. I had no wish
To hear them once.

NEOP. Know then my purpose now:
Thou hast heard all.

ULYS. There is, be thou assured
There is who will prevent thy purpose.

NEOP. What!
Who shall prevent me?

ULYS. The united host
Of Greece, and with them I.

NEOP. Wise though thou art,
Thy words no wisdom show.

ULYS. Nor wise thy words,
Nor would thy deeds be wise.

NEOP. If they are just,
They have an excellence beyond the wise.

ULYS. Where is the justice to return the arms
Won by my counsels?

NEOP. I have done a deed

Of baseness, and will expiate the guilt.

ULYS. Thus acting, fear'st thou not the troops of Greece?

NEOP. By justice guided thy suggested fears
I scorn; nor shall thy hand my actions rule.

ULYS. No more 'gainst Troy, but thee, our arms are turn'd.

NEOP. Let come what will come.

ULYS. See my hand, it grasps
My sword.

NEOP. See mine, my sword as prompt to grasp.

ULYS. I now forbear thee: to the host of Greece
This will I tell; their vengeance thou shalt feel.

NEOP. Thou hast shown wisdom: always be thus wise,
And tears perchance may not bedew thy path.—
Ho! son of Pœas! Philoctetes, ho!
Come forth, and quit thy cavern in the rock.

PHILOCTETES, NEOPTOLEMUS, CHORUS.

PHIL. What means this clamorous uproar at my cave?
Why call you me? What would you? Ah, I fear
Some further mischief. Come you to augment
My woes, and add to ill some greater ill?

NEOP. Be confident, and calmly hear my words.

PHIL. Already I have heard them; they were fair:
I trusted them, and basely was deceived.

NEOP. Canst thou forgive? I blush at what is past.

PHIL. So didst thou speak, so win my easy faith,
Veiling the treacherous fraud that stole my bow.

NEOP. But not so now. This I would hear from thee:
Is thy heart fix'd in this drear cave to stay,
Or wilt thou sail with us?

PHIL. Forbear; no more;
For all, which thou canst urge, will be in vain.

NEOP. Is this thy firm resolve?

PHIL. Be thou assured

It is, more firm than language can express.

NEOP. It was my wish my words might have prevail'd:
If they offend thee, I will say no more.

PHIL. Thy plea were vain: nor wilt thou find my heart
Feeling for thee one favourable thought.
Thou hast deprived me of the means of life;
And now with thy monitions art thou come,
Thou hated son of an illustrious sire!
Perdition seize you all, th' Atridæ first,
Ulysses next, then thee.

NEOP. Forbear thy curse,
And from my hand receive thy bow again.

PHIL. What, am I then a second time deceived?

NEOP. By the high awe of holy Jove I swear.

PHIL. These words, if true, with transport fill my soul.

NEOP. The deed shall prove them true. Stretch forth thy hand,
And of thy sacred arms again be lord.

ULYSSES, NEOPTOLEMUS, PHILOCTETES, CHORUS.

ULYS. That for th' Atridæ and the Grecian host,
(Ye gods bear witness to me) I forbid.

PHIL. Whose voice is this? Ulysses do I hear?

ULYS. Be thou assured of that, and seest him nigh
Who to the plains of Troy will bear thee hence
By force, and in defiance of this Youth.

PHIL. But not with joy, if well this shaft be aim'd.

NEOP. Ah no; discharge not, by the gods, the shaft.

PHIL. Nay, by the gods, my son, let go my hand.

NEOP. I must not let it go.

PHIL. Why wou'dst thou check
My vengeance on a foe, an hated foe?

NEOP. That were to thee dishonour, and to me.

PHIL. But know thou this; these Grecian Chiefs, so prompt

With studied falsehoods to betray, in fight
Are dastards, but right valiant with their tongues.

NEOP. Well, let that pass: thou hast thy bow; no cause
Hast thou of anger, or to blame me more.

PHIL. I own it; thou hast shown thy generous blood
Nobly descended, not from Sisyphus
But from Achilles, of illustrious fame
When living, and illustrious 'mongst the dead.

NEOP. The praise thou givest my father and myself
Is grateful to me: but what I desire
From thee t' obtain, now hear. The ills, on men
Inflicted by the gods, they must sustain:
But miseries on themselves by choice derived,
And self-will'd waywardness, have no just claim
To pardon, or to pity. All thy thoughts
Are wild and fierce; thy soul disdains advice;
And when with warm benevolence a friend
Glows to direct thee right, thy hatred flames,
And treats him as a foe: yet I will speak,
And call almighty Jove t' attest the truth.
Hear thou my words, and write them on thy heart.
The anguish of this wound was by the gods
Assign'd thee, when thy foot too near approach'd
The fatal place, where lay conceal'd from view
The serpent, guardian of th' uncover'd shrine

L. 1327. The dry and warm cavities in old tombs and ruined altars afforded a commodious shelter to serpents; such as were found there were superstitiously considered as partaking of the sacredness of the place, and looked upon with reverence. Poetry soon availed itself of so peculiar a circumstance: the portentous dragon amidst the altars at Aulis was sent by Jupiter: and the learned Virgil, having described one of these animals at the tomb of Anchises with all the vivid glow of poetic colouring, says, Obstupuit visu Æneas—

Incertus geniumne loci, famulumne parentis
Esse putet.

See Iliad ii. v. 305. and Æneid v. v. 84.

At Chryse. From this fierce disease no pause,
Be thou assured, is thine, whilst in the east
Yon sun shall rise, and rolling its bright course
Sink in the west, till it beholds thee tread
With willing steps the plains of Ilium: there
The sons of Æsculapius shalt thou find,
And of thy wound be heal'd: then shall thy bow,
Join'd by my arms, lay waste the Phrygian state.
How I know this, attend, and thou shalt hear.
Amidst the Grecian camp there is a man
From Troy, a captive, Helenus, a seer
Of high renown: the fates he thus declared;
Adding that ere the present summer yields
To autumn its dominion, Troy must fall:
That this is true he sets his life at gage.
Assured of this, let thy reluctance cease,
Embark with us. What honour to be rank'd
First 'mongst the Grecian heroes, by the sons
Of Pæan to be heal'd, to storm the tow'rs
Of Troy lamenting with deep groans her fall,
And grasp the highest meed that glory gives!
PHIL. Oh hated life, why in the light of heav'n
Dost thou detain me? Why not sink me down
To the dark mansions of the dead? Ah me,
To his monitions shall I still be deaf?
They flow from generous friendship. Should I yield,
How in the face of day could I appear?
With whom hold converse? How, ye eyes that view

L. 1355. It is one province of Notes, of such at least as we often find on this author, to add perplexity and confusion to difficulty. This passage is by no means clear; it is thus explained; it may mean either the revolutions of time—or the orbs of the sun, and perhaps of the moon too—or the eyes of Philoctetes himself—or the eyes of those that behold him. In this last sense the translator understands it; the reader will judge for himself.

All things around me, would ye bear these things?
How bear to see me friendly with the sons
Of Atreus, authors of these cruel wrongs?
How with Ulysses, that destructive pest?
Yet not the just resentment of past griefs
Pierces so deep as that presaging sense
Of what I yet must suffer: for the mind,
That to base deeds gives birth, assiduous trains,
Like an ill parent, other deeds as base.
At thee indeed I marvel much; to Troy
Thou never shou'dst steer back thy course, and me
Thou shou'dst keep far from those, who basely wrong'd,
And robb'd thee of thy father's glorious arms *.
Yet wilt thou go, confederate in the war
With these, compelling me to join their arms.
Not so, my son; me to my country send,
I have thy oath, do thou at Scyros stay,
And let them vilely perish in return
For their vile deeds; a double grace to me,
And to thy father; to the base afford
No aid, but show thou art not base like them.

NEOP. What thou hast said has reason: yet I wish
That to the gods obedient, and my words,
With me thy friend from Lemnos thou wou'dst sail.

PHIL. What, to Sigæum, and the hated son
Of Atreus, with the anguish of this wound?

NEOP. To those, whose skill shall stanch this putrid gore,
Heal thy disease, and free thee from thy pains.

PHIL. Why this inglorious measure dost thou urge?

NEOP. Wou'dst thou comply, thy glory, I foresee,
It would advance, and mine.

* A short passage, which in all the editions disgraces Sophocles, is here omitted. Brunck rejects it as spurious with great indignation, Color ipse adsuti centonis mangonem prodit.

PHIL. While thus thou speak'st,
Dost thou not blush in reverence of the gods?
NEOP. Why should kind office raise a blush?
PHIL. To me,
Or to th' Atridæ kind?
NEOP. To thee a friend
I speak the words of friendship.
PHIL. To my foes
Would friendship yield me?
NEOP. Learn amidst thy ills
More gentle thoughts.
PHIL. I know thee; thy soft words
Would sooth me into ruin.
NEOP. Far from me
Be such design: thou dost not know——
PHIL. I know
The sons of Atreus left me on these rocks.
NEOP. But (think on this) they wish to save thee now.
PHIL. Not to see Troy: my soul abhors the thought.
NEOP. What can I do, since all that I can urge
Moves not thy mind? An easier part remains,
To urge my plea no more, but let thee live,
As now thou livest, thy disease unheal'd.
PHIL. Yes, let me suffer what my fate requires
I suffer. But, remember, thou hast pledged
Thy hand to bear me to my household gods:
Perform it; haste; and think of Troy no more:
Troy hath already caused me groans enough.
NEOP. Well; if it be thy pleasure, let us go.
PHIL. That generous word with transport fills my soul.
NEOP. Assay thy steps.
PHIL. With all the strength I have.
NEOP. Th' avenging Grecians how shall I escape?
PHIL. Regard them not.

NEOP. Should they my country waste?
PHIL. I will be present.
NEOP. What thy potent aid?
PHIL. These shafts of Hercules shall check their march;
No hostile pow'r thy country shall approach.
NEOP. Wilt thou do this? Then come, embark with me,
And to the rocks of Lemnos bid farewell.

HERCULES, PHILOCTETES, NEOPTOLEMUS, CHORUS.

HERC. Not yet, O son of Pœas: to my words
First be attentive. Know thou hear'st the voice
Of Hercules, thine eyes behold his form.
Leaving the heav'nly mansions for thy sake
I come, announcing the decrees of Jove,
And charge thee not to steer thy purposed course.
Do thou with fix'd attention mark my words.
My fortunes to thy memory I recal,
What dangers I subdued, what toils achieved,
By virtue made immortal, as thine eyes
Behold. And know, thou too must suffer thus,
And by such toils a life of glory gain.
Go with this leader to the walls of Troy;
There first thy fell disease shall be relieved:
There 'midst the host of Greece in valour rank'd
The noblest of her heroes, with thy bow
Paris, the guilty cause of all these ills,
Thou shalt deprive of life, lay waste the state
Of Troy, and send triumphant to thy house,
To Œta, to thy father, the rich spoils,
Selected by the host, thy glorious prize.
But bear thou to my funeral pyre these spoils,
The trophies of my bow.—My mandates now,
Son of Achilles, I to thee address;
For without him thou hast not pow'r to waste

The fields of Troy; nor he without thy arms;
But, like two lions that together range,
Guard each the other. I to Troy will send
Sage Æsculapius; he shall heal thy wound;
For Ilium by my shafts again must fall.
But 'midst the ravages of conquest spare,
With reverence spare things sacred to the gods:
This holy awe is pleasing to high Jove:
For piety with mortals doth not die;
Live they or die, that never perishes.

PHIL. With joy once more beyond my hopes I hear
That voice, with joy that long lost form behold.
Thy mandates unreluctant I obey.

NEOP. I too with reverence bow to thy commands.

HERC. Delay not then: the favouring gales arise,
Inviting to a prosperous course your sails.

PHIL. Well, I now go; but first address this land.
Farewell thou mansion, guardian of my life!
Ye Nymphs, that o'er th' irriguous vales preside,
Farewell, and thou loud roar of dashing waves!
Oft hath your foam within this cavern'd rock,
Driv'n by the stormy South, bedew'd my head.
And thou, Hermæan mountain, who my groans
Hast oft re-echoed in my storms of woe!
Now, O ye fountains, and ye dulcet streams,
I leave you, now I leave you: this my thoughts
Never presaged. Farewell, thou wave-wash'd shore
Of Lemnos; speed my course, and send me safe
Whither my glorious destiny now calls,
The counsels of my friends, and that high pow'r
Whose sovereign will these great events ordain'd!

CHOR. Let us now go, together let us go,
And to the ocean-nymphs present our vows
With guardian care to speed our wish'd return.

ELECTRA.

ELECTRA.

THE Choephoræ of Æschylus, and the Electra of Euripides have already been presented to the English reader. Of the necessity which obliged Orestes to execute this revenge on the murderers of his father, and of the fierce and determined character of Electra, enough has been said in the translator's prefaces to those tragedies: a short view of the management of the subject by the three great poets may not be unpleasing here. Euripides yielding to the bold and exalted genius of Æschylus, pursued a plan more adapted to the exquisite sensibility of his own mind, and by presenting his Electra in a rustic cottage, and patiently engaged in the laborious offices of her humble station, he renders her amiable before he displays the noble elevation of her mind: he always knew the way to touch the heart. Sophocles has dared to dispute the palm with Æchylus even on

his own ground; but he was too prudent to meet him at the tomb of Agamemnon: the first Choral Ode of the Choephoræ, the oblations and vows of Electra, her discovery of Orestes there, and their united invocations of their father's shade, are so sublime, so solemn, and so awful, that a succeeding poet had little to hope from a similar attempt. Sophocles therefore presents his Electra before the gates of the palace, and has called forth all the magic powers of his poetry in her soliloquy; this, and her first conference with the Chorus, are to an high degree affecting; she appears with all the dignity of grief and virtuous resentment: but in Æschylus this derives an awful grandeur from the solemnity of the scene. Sophocles was sensible of this, and unwilling to lose a grace, which however he could not reach. Æschylus had represented Clytemnestra as terrified with dreams and visions, and sending Electra with oblations to the tomb of Agamemnon: her fears are described in that poet's boldest manner;

> She fancied she had giv'n a dragon birth.—
> This new-born dragon, like an infant child,
> Laid in the cradle seem'd in want of food;
> And in her dream she held it to her breast.—
> The milk he drew was mix'd with clotted blood.—
> She cried out in her sleep with wild affright.'

Sophocles also represents her as terrified with dreams and visions, and sending Chrysothemis in like manner to the tomb;

This is the voice of rumour, that she saw
Thine and my father to the light return'd
Once more her husband; in the earth he fix'd
The sceptre of his ancestors, which once
He bore, but now Ægisthus; from its top
Sprouted a vigorous branch, and spread its shade
Wide o'er Mycenæ and its ample realms.

These visions characterize the different genius of the two poets: the ideas of Æschylus are vast, exalted, and daring; Sophocles is rich, splendid, and judicious; Æschylus had siezed the highest excellence of composition, the true sublime, and in this he shines with unrivalled lustre; but in the judicious accommodation of these conceptions to the conduct of the drama, in the richness, union and harmony of its parts, Sophocles was never equalled. From the departure of Chrysothemis to the tomb he draws from his own stores. The interview of Electra with her mother is a wonderful scene; the narrative of the death of Orestes is well imagined; and the introduction of the urn, said to contain his ashes, shows the finest judgment, not only as it produces circumstances which tend to exalt the character of Electra, but as it renders the discovery of Orestes peculiarly tender and interesting, and facilitates the dreadful catastrophy.

PERSONS OF THE DRAMA.

ORESTES

PYLADES, MUTA PERSONA

ÆGISTHUS

CLYTEMNESTRA

ELECTRA

CHRYSOTHEMIS

OLD ATTENDANT ON ORESTES

CHORUS OF MYCENÆAN VIRGINS.

ELECTRA.

1—17

ORESTES, PYLADES, ATTENDANT.

ATT. Thou son of Agamemnon, who 'gainst Troy
Once led the pow'rs of Greece, now may thine eyes
Behold what long hath raised thy ardent wish.
This is the ancient Argos; this the grove
Of Iö, stung with frenzy o'er the earth
To wander; the Lycæan forum this
Of the Lycæan Phœbus; on the left
Glorious through Greece that stately temple stands
Sacred to Juno. Now we are advanced
Whence thou may'st see Mycenæ rich in gold;
And this the house of the Pelopidæ
With frequent slaughters stain'd: in times long past,
Beneath his murderers when thy father fell,
I took thee from thy sister's pious hand,
I bore thee hence, I saved thee, to this age
I train'd thee to avenge thy father's blood.
This hour, Orestes, and thou faithful friend,

Loved Pylades, demands your firm resolves:
This hour determine; for the early songs
Of birds call forth the sun's resplendent beams,
And the stars vanish from the dusky night.
Now, ere the foot of man from forth the gates
Shall tread the streets, consult: for from this hour
Th' important time to instant action calls.

ORES. O thou most loved of servants, strong the proofs
Thou givest me of thy goodness and firm faith:
For as the generous steed e'en in old age
Of his high courage in the fierce alarm
Abates not, but with pride sustains the charge,
So dost thou urge me forward, and advance
E'en in the front of danger: for this cause
I will unfold my counsels; to my words
Give thou attentive heed, and where I judge
Amiss, thy riper prudence be my guide.
When to the fate-foretelling shrine I came
Of Pytho, and inquired by what best way
I on his impious murderers might avenge
My father's blood, this answer Phœbus gave,
" In arms advance not, nor with martial force,
" But steal upon them, and with fraudful hand
" Let thy just fury strike th' avenging blow."
These mandates known, as time and chance present
A fair occasion, enter thou this house,
And learn what passes there; me much imports
Clear information; thee they will not know
Absent so long, and chang'd by hoary age;
Nor thus attired suspicion wilt thou wake.
Thou art a stranger, so address thy tale,
Of Phocis, sent by Phanoteus, now join'd
In close alliance with them; say, and add

The sanction of an oath, that by the force
Of ruthless fate Orestes is no more,
Hurl'd from his chariot in the Pythian games.
This be the purport of thy tale. Mean time,
Obedient to the god, my father's tomb
We with libations and these sever'd locks
Will honour. Thence returning, in our hands
The brazen sculptured urn, now, as thou know'st,
Hid in the tangled thicket, we will bring;
That we may thus deceive them with a tale
To them most grateful, that my wretched corse
Already on the funeral pile is burnt,
And my cold ashes in this urn enclosed.
Why should this grieve me, that in words I die,
When I in deed am saved, and by them raised
To glory? Nor ill-omen'd shall I deem
A word which gives the promise of success.
Oft e'en the wise have I observed, by fame
Reported dead, return, and rise again
To higher honour. Such shall be my boast,

L. 51. Orestes is here acting by the express command of Apollo; and is not to be considered as impious in this oath, but as obedient to the will of the god. Camerar.

L. 66. P. Brumoy, who was well acquainted with the superstition of the ancients, resolves this into the dread of words of ill presage. His Editor censures him as inaccurate, and says, Il n'est question ici ni de superstitions, ni de presage funeste. He then gives his sense of the line as containing what he might well call "a detestible maxim," Pour moi je ne tiens pour mauvaise aucune parole (aucune tromperie) des qu'elle est utile. The critic is very unhappy in his interpretation: it is neither consonant to the manly character of Orestes, nor to the rest of his speech. A passage in the Helena of Euripides will throw light on this. When that lady for the safety of her husband proposed to speak of him to the king of Ægypt as dead, Menelaus replies

That were an omen boding ill: yet thence
May aught be gain'd, report of me as dead. L. 1132.

I from this rumour shall be found alive,
And, like a star, to my astonish'd foes
Yet shine. But, O my country, and ye gods
The guardians of my country, to your care
Receive me, and protect me in these ways!
And thou, my father's house! for I am come
With vengeance, at the impulse of the gods,
To purge thy stain away: send me not hence
Dishonour'd, but to wealth, to greatness raised,
Give me thy ancient glories to restore!
Of this enough. Be it thy care, old man,
The part assign'd thee to discharge. We two
Must leave thee now; th' occasion so requires,
Whose sovereign power o'er ev'ry work presides.

ELEC. O miserable me! [*within.*

ATT. Some female servant with the voice of grief
Methinks I hear lamenting in the house.

ORES. Is it not rather poor Electra's voice?
Wilt thou we stay and listen to her moans?

ATT. That must not be: no deed may we attempt
Ere we perform the mandates of the god.
Begin with these; and at thy father's tomb
Pour the libations: that will give us strength
To act, and conquest to our toils ensure.

ELEC. Thou holy light, thou air around the earth
Extended wide, how often hast thou heard
My strains of woe, how often heard me beat
My bleeding breast, when night before the dawn
Withdraws her darkening veil! For in her shades
The hated couches of this mournful house
Are conscious to my grief, while I lament
My father's ruin: him the god of war
Sunk not with wounds in a barbaric land;
My mother, and the partner of her bed,

Ægisthus, hew'd him with the bloody axe
As woodmen hew an oak; nor does thy death,
My father, thy unjust and cruel death
With sorrow touch one female heart, save mine.
But never will I cease my strains of woe,
My mournful lamentations, whilst I view
The stars bright radiance, whilst I view the day.
No; as some nightingale, her young ones lost,
Before my father's gates I pour to all
My wailings, and the notes of woe, aloud.
O house of Pluto and his gloomy queen;
O Hermes, guide to the infernal realms;
Thou, dreaded Ate; and ye pow'rs revered,
Terrific Furies, daughters of the gods;
Those, who by impious hands were slain, you see;
Those, who by stealth the royal bed invade;
Come, aid, avenge my murder'd father's blood;
Send me my brother; for this weight of grief,
Which sinks me, I no more can bear alone!

ELECTRA, CHORUS.

CHOR. Why, poor Electra, in thy mother's crimes
For ever wretched, wilt thou pine away
In never-ceasing grief? Why still lament
The royal Agamemnon, long since caught
In that most impious woman's treacherous wiles,
And basely to a murderer's hands betray'd?
Perish the wretch, if I may form that wish,
So perish he, who dared the bloody deed!

ELEC. Ye virgins, who from noble parents boast

L. 131. It has been the subject of serious dispute whether the Chorus is formed of Virgins or of Matrons. They are not once styled παρθένοι, nor on the other hand is there any allusion to their married state. Γυναῖκες is a common name. Deianira addresses the Trachinian Virgins, φίλαι γυναῖκες,

Your generous blood, you come amidst my woes
To bring me consolation. Well I know
These things, I understand them well, no part
Escapes me; yet I will not cease to grieve;
No; I will never cease to mourn, and wail
My murder'd father's fate. But, O my friends,
Dear to my heart by every tender tie
Of mutual love, permit me thus to pour,
Ah me! I pray you, my unceasing griefs.

CHOR. Yet neither will thy griefs or pray'rs recal
Thy father o'er that lake, whose sullen stream
All, sprung from mortal race, are doom'd to pass.
Why then not moderate thy sorrows? Why
Thus waste away in wild excess of grief,
Which from thy ills gives no redemption? Why
This fondness for intolerable woe?

ELEC. He to all sense is lost, who can forget
A parent's cruel death. The mournful bird,
The messenger of Jove, that always wails
Her Itys, her lost Itys, sooths my soul
With all the tender sympathy of grief.
And thee, unhappy Niobe, I hold
In reverence as divine, who pour'st thy tears
Fix'd in a rock, the monument of woe.

v. 229. The word *μάτηρ*, v. 236, is used only in a simile, from which no argument can be drawn. It is more consonant to manners that the friends and companions of Electra should be Virgins; and she addresses them as daughters of illustrious fathers, not as wives of illustrious husbands.

L. 155. Ἅ τ' ἐν τάφῳ πετραίῳ αἶ, αἶ δακρύεις.

Thus Ovid. Met. lib. vi.

Turn'd to solid stone,
Yet still she weeps, and whirl'd by stormy winds,
Borne thro' the air, her native country finds;
There fix'd, she stands upon a bleaky hill,
There yet her marble cheeks eternal tears distil.

CHOR. Yet not by thee alone of all that breathe
Is sorrow felt. What share is thine, beyond
Those in this house by blood to thee allied?
Such is the life Chrysothemis endures;
Such Iphianassa's sufferings; such the Youth's,
Who in concealment and in silence mourns.

ELEC. Him blest and glorious this illustrious land
Of rich Mycenæ shall again receive,
The nobly-born Orestes, to these realms
Returning by the favouring pow'r of Jove.
With ardent expectation his return
I look for, wretched, childless, unespoused,
Restless, for ever bath'd in tears that flow
In anguish for my never-ceasing ills.
Yet all my kindness he mean-time forgets,
All my instructions. How have I been mock'd
With messages? He wishes to return,
But to his wish he deigns not to appear.

CHOR. Sink not, Ah sink not in despair. In heav'n
From his high throne Almighty Jove beholds
And governs all things: to his pow'r resign
Thy flaming indignation; let not hate
Too far transport thee; nor forget these wrongs.
Time is a lenient god. Nor will the son
Of Agamemnon on the pastured beach
Of Chrisa linger, never to return,
Nor the dread god that reigns o'er Acheron.

ELEC. But of my life how much to me is lost
Already? And, by hope not cheer'd, my ills
No longer can I bear, but waste away;
My parents lost, and by no worthy friend
Protected, like a foreign slave I serve,
Disgraceful task! within my father's house,
My table scanty, and my vestments mean.

CHOR. Mournful at his return the voice of woe,
Through all the chambers of thy father's house
Mournful the voice, when the relentless axe
In tempest fell. Fraud first devised, Lust struck
The murderous blow, with horrid thought of old
Forming the horrid image, were these deeds
Or by some god, or daring mortals, wrought.

ELEC. O day, how hateful to me were thy beams!
O fatal night, and all the hideous woes
Of that nefarious supper! O vile death,
Which closed my father's eyes, how basely slain,
Slain by the hands of two! Those hands destroy'd
My life, betray'd, abandon'd, and undone.
Oh may the mighty god, that holds his seat
On high Olympus, on their heads repay
Avenging sufferings! Never may they taste
The sweet delights of joy, who did these things!

CHOR. Let prudence teach thee caution: curb thy speech.
Dost thou not see from what a splendid state
Already thou art sunk, disgraced with wrongs
Suffer'd by thee alone? And greater wrongs
Still shalt thou suffer, if thy mourning heart
With wars is always pregnant. To contend
With potent sovereigns is unequal strife.

ELEC. I am compell'd by miseries: yet I know
My madness; yes, my friends, I know it well;
But, in the anguish of such deep-felt griefs,
I will not check it whilst my life remains.
For who with lenient words can sooth my soul?
What now can sage advice? Forbear, forbear
To comfort me. These griefs shall have no end;
No; from my sorrows I will never cease,
But with eternal wailings mourn my fate.

CHOR. I speak through pure benevolence of heart,

As a fond mother anxious for her child,
Let not thy ills give birth to other ills.

ELEC. Have then my ills a bound? Say, can the heart
Feel a just sense of virtue, and forget
A murder'd parent? Nature at the thought
Is shock'd. From them no honour would I have;
Nor, were I wedded to some worthy man,
Would I live with him hushing all my griefs
To peace, and checking their shrill-sounding flight,
My father so disgracing. If the dead,
As earth, and nothing more, neglected lies,
And if no vengeance waits their crimes, farewell
To shame, farewell to piety 'mongst men.

CHOR. Our duty, by our zeal for thee enforced,
Induced us hither: if our friendly words
Offend thy sense of honour, we desist;
Thine be the conquest, and to follow, ours.

ELEC. I am ashamed, my friends, if deem'd by you
Indulging an excess of grief and tears;
But they are wrung from me by bitter force;
Forgive me then. How can a woman, sprung
From noble blood, who sees her father's wrongs,
Not mourn as I do, who each day, each night,
Behold those wrongs increasing with fresh force?
My mother, she who bore me, is the first
In all despiteful treatment. Then I live
In mine own house with those, whose impious hands
Murder'd my father; these I feel my lords,
And at their pleasure I receive, or want.
Think then what grief-embitter'd days I pass,
When seated on my father's throne I see
Ægisthus, see him in my father's robes
Array'd, and pouring to the household gods
Libations on the spot where his curs'd hand

Shed the king's blood. And (oh that blackest stain!)
I see the murderer in my father's bed
With my abandon'd mother, if the name
Of mother be her due, who shares this bed
With him, unblushing with this man of blood
Cohabits, and no vengeful Fury fears;
But, as exulting in her horrid deeds,
Oft as the month leads round the welcome day
In which my father by her wiles she slew,
She forms the festal dance, and to the gods,
As guardians of her house, the victims slays.
These things I see, and weep, and waste away
At a vile feast, that bears my father's name,
In secret mourning, for I dare not pour
My tears to sooth the anguish of my soul;
For soon this woman, to her noble name
A foul disgrace, calls out, and with harsh words
Reviles me, "Wretch, detested by the gods,
"To thee alone then did thy father die?
"Dost none but thou lament him? Get thee hence,
"And perish: never may th' infernal gods
"Soften the sorrows which now rend thy heart!"
Thus she reviles me; but if one she hears
Speak of Orestes as returning, wild
With rage she comes, and thunders in my ears,
"Thou art the cause of this; this is thy work;
"By thee Orestes from my hand was snatch'd,
"By thee in secret hence convey'd: but know
"Thou shalt be punish'd as thy deeds deserve."

L. 265. Clytemnestra, in imitation of the solemn honours paid to the gods and heroes on the New Moons, called therefore ἔμμηνα ἱερὰ, instituted a monthly festival, with sacrifices to the Gods her Preservers, on the day on which Agamemnon was murdered. This was celebrated with songs and dances, and a feast insolently called Epulæ Agamemnoniæ.

Then to her savage menace adding flames
Comes her illustrious husband, that disgrace
To manhood, who his coward battles fights,
Polluted monster, with a woman leagued.
Whilst expectation always prompts my hopes
That, arm'd with vengeance to repress these ills,
Orestes will return, I pine with grief.
Still he delays to act; and this delay
Sinks all my present, and my future hopes.
In such a state, my friends, the human mind
But ill preserves a calm well-temper'd frame,
And holy reverence; but, oppress'd with ills,
By sad constraint turns all its thoughts to ill.

CHOR. But tell us, is Ægisthus, while we hold
This converse, near, or distant from this place?

ELEC. Far distant in the country: were he near,
Think not I thus might walk before the gates.

CHOR. If it be so, more freely may we hold
Discourse, and unrestrain'd inquiry make.

ELEC. What thy mind prompts thee, ask, from him secure.

CHOR. First of thy brother then it is my wish
To know. Returns he, or delays he still?

ELEC. Oft hath he promised; nothing he performs.

CHOR. In arduous actions men must oft delay.

ELEC. But him without delay I fondly saved.

CHOR. But of his noble nature be assured;
This will impel him to protect his friends.

ELEC. Of this my soul hath ever been assured;
Else in this state I had not lived so long.

CHOR. Speak now no more; for from the gates I see
Chrysothemis advance, thy sister sprung
From the same parents: in her hands she bears
Sepulchral offerings, honours to the dead.

CHRYSOTHEMIS, ELECTRA, CHORUS.

CHRY. Why, O my sister, is thy voice thus raised
Before the portal? Will no length of time
Teach thee no more to feed thy feeble rage
With thoughts as vain? I feel these present ills,
And, if I know myself, had I the pow'r,
Would show my thoughts: but while the storm is high,
I deem it prudent to let down my sails,
Nor dream of mighty deeds, while void of force
I cannot hurt. Thus would I thou shou'dst act.
Yet what I say perhaps hath not such strength
Of reason as thy firmer conduct shows;
But, as becomes my birth if I would live,
The potent must in all things be obey'd.

ELEC. How shameful this, descended as thou art
From such a father, to forget his worth,
And court thy mother's favour! For by her
All thy monitions to me were enjoin'd,
Her teaching, not the dictates of thy heart.
What should I think? Thy nature must be base;
Or, if not base, no memory of thy friends
Dost thou retain. Thou said'st, hadst thou the pow'r,
Thy hate thou soon wou'dst show them: yet with me,
On vengeance for my father always bent,
Thou wilt not act, but rather wish to check
My purpose. Is not this to add to ills
Base cowardice? But tell me, or learn thou
From me, what good should I obtain, my griefs
Should I command to cease? Do I not live?
But ill, I know; yet I am satisfied.
I grieve their hearts in paying to the dead
These honours, if the dead have yet a sense
Of honours. Thou dost hate them: but thy hate
Is in words only; thou canst bear to live

Amidst thy father's murderers. But my soul
Would never bend, would never yield to them,
No, should they bring me all those gorgeous gifts
With which thou now art deck'd. To thee be placed
A table richly spread, with dishes piled;
But let my homely fare be only such
As nature loaths not. I have not a wish
To gain thy honours; nor indeed wou'dst thou,
Did reason rule thee. Now thou might'st be call'd
The daughter of a father first in fame;
Be call'd thy mother's: so shalt thou appear,
To all that judge aright, of nature base,
False to thy murder'd father, and his friends.

CHOR. Now, by the gods, let nothing pass in wrath.
Much mutual good your reasonings might produce,
Wert thou to hers attentive, she to thine.

CHRY. I have been long accustom'd to such words
From her, my friends; and never had I touch'd
This tender point, but that some dreadful ill
Advances on her, which will check her griefs.

ELEC. What dreadful ill is this? If more severe
Than these, thy counsel I no more oppose.

CHRY. Far as I know it I will tell thee all.
They purpose, if thou cease not thy loud griefs,
To send thee where no more thou shalt behold
The sun's bright radiance, in some cheerless vault
To live, far distant, there to chant thy woes.
Reflect; nor henceforth blame me when these ills
Fall heavy on thee: this is wisdom's hour.

ELEC. Thus will they treat me? Is their purpose fix'd?

CHRY. Soon as Ægisthus shall return.

ELEC. And soon
May he for this return.

CHRY. What dreadful wish

Hast thou thus rashly form'd?

ELEC. That he may come,
If thus he thinks to act.

CHRY. That thou may'st feel
Their vengeance! What thy meaning?

ELEC. Far from you
That I may fly.

CHRY. And hast thou for thy life
No care, no thought?

ELEC. Mine is a glorious life,
Exciting admiration!

CHRY. Wou'dst thou take
Calm prudence for thy guide, it might be such.

ELEC. Teach me not baseness to my friends.

CHRY. I teach
No baseness, but submission to the great,
Who hold the sovereign pow'r.

ELEC. Cringe to them thou;
I scorn to cringe.

CHRY. Well were it not to fall
Through wayward wilfulness.

ELEC. If I must fall,
My father's death avenging let me fall.

CHRY. Of us our father, well am I assured,
Requires not this.

ELEC. Such words the base alone
Can e'er applaud.

CHRY. Will no persuasions move
Thy heart to yield assent?

ELEC. None: from my heart
Far be such weakness.

CHRY. Hence then will I go,
And execute my charge.

ELEC. What charge? To whom

Bear'st thou those offerings?

CHRY. By my mother sent
To pour libations at my father's tomb.

ELEC. What say'st thou? Sent to him whom, when he lived,
She most abhorr'd!

CHRY. And with her own hand slew,
So wou'dst thou say.

ELEC. Persuaded by her friends?
Who thus advised her?

CHRY. She was moved, I think,
By dreadful visions, terrors of the night.

ELEC. Gods of my fathers, give us now your aid!

CHRY. What from these terrors animates thy hope?

ELEC. Tell me the vision, thou shalt know my hopes.

CHRY. I know not all; but little can I speak.

ELEC. Tell me that little: oft imperfect words
Sink mortals low, or raise their spirits high.

CHOR. This is the voice of rumour, that she saw
Thine and my father, to the light return'd,
Once more her husband; in the earth he fix'd
The sceptre of his ancestors, which once
He bore, but now Ægisthus; from its top
Sprouted a vigorous branch, and spread its shade
Wide o'er Mycenæ and its ample realms.
This from one present, when she told her dream
To the bright Sun, I heard. No more than this
I know, but that she sent me to the tomb
Struck with this fear. Now by our country's gods

L. 425. This is in conformity to the superstition of the ancients. When any vision, or dream, or other circumstance of ill or uncertain presage occurred to them in the night, they told it in the morning to the earth, to the air, to the skies, or to some deity. See the Alcestes of Euripides, l. 246. Medea, l. 64. Iphigenia in Tauris, l. 52 of the translation. But the address was with peculiar propriety made to the Sun, as the averter of the evils of the night.

I pray thee, be persuaded; do not rush
On ruin through perverseness: shou'dst thou now
Reject me, thou wilt seek me in thy ills.

ELEC. But nothing, my loved sister, of these gifts
Affix thou to the tomb; it is not meet,
It is not holy, that such offerings, sent
By this malignant woman, should be placed;
Or such libations to our father's shade
Be pour'd: no: give them to the winds, or dig
Deep in the covering earth, and hide them there;
That nothing of them where our father rests
May ever come, but lie a precious store
For her when dead, and in the realms below.
For were not she, of all her sex, most lost
To shame, this hateful globlet to the man
Her own hands murder'd never had she crown'd.
For canst thou think the dead within his tomb,
His indignation soften'd, will receive
These offerings from the hand by which he died
Dishonour'd, mangled with relentless hate,
Amidst th' ablutions all the stains of blood
Wiped on his head? And canst thou think these things
Will make atonement for the murderous deed?
It may not be: then think of them no more.
But cut thou off thy fair and crisped curls,
And from my wretched head (small gift indeed,
But all I have to give) these squalid locks;
With them present my zone, not richly wrought
With bright embroidery: bow before the tomb,
And pour thy prayers that from beneath the earth
Propitious he would come, against our foes

L. 447. See the Choephoræ of Æschylus, l. 437, and the translator's note.

L. 448. Thereby hoping to transfer all the pollution from themselves on the head of the person murdered. Heath.

A strong protector ; that with potent hand
His son, Orestes, may return, and live,
And trample those, that hate him, in the dust :
Then will we crown his tomb with richer gifts
Than now we can present. These things I think,
Yes, I will think he makes these things his care,
And therefore with these dreams appals her soul.
Do thou, my sister, in this hope perform
These things, for my sake, for thine own, for his,
Dearest of all that breath'd this vital air,
Our father, laid in the unsparing tomb.

CHOR. This from a pious heart the virgin speaks :
Our love exhorts thee discharge the trust.

CHRY. Yes, I will do it : for when justice bids,
Reason disputes not, but makes haste to act.
But by the gods, my friends, whilst I attempt
These works, amidst you well the secret guard ;
For should my mother know it, much I fear
I should have cause the daring deed to mourn.

ELECTRA, CHORUS....CHORUS.

STRO. If wisdom with one prescient ray
Illumes the darkness of my soul,
The vengeful Fury speeds her way ;
Before her, baleful omens scowl ;
I hear the flaping of their wings ;
The force of justice in her hands she brings.
The dreadful visions of the night I hear :
They breathe sweet music to my ear ;
My courage kindles at th' inspiring sound.
Thy father rouses in the realms below ;
Ne'er will the king of Greece forget his wound,
Ne'er the old Axe of brass, that struck th' insidious blow.

ANTIS. She comes, with all her hundred hands,

Her hundred feet, the furious pow'r,
No more in dreadful ambush stands;
She comes, she knows her torturing hour;
With feet of brass I hear her tread;
She marks th' unholy, blood-polluted bed:
Vengeful 'gainst those th' accursed attempt who dared,
And those the horrid deed who shared,
She sends these boding signs, nor sends in vain.
If aught of truth terrific dreams disclose,
If aught the oracle's prophetic strain,
This vision of the night our happier state foreshows.

EPOD. How black with miseries to this land,
O Pelops, was thy fatal course,
When jealous Pisa's dangerous strand
Saw thy swift car's victorious force!
For since by rage, untaught to spare,
The hapless Myrtilus was slain,
Hurl'd headlong from the golden car,
And plunged into the roaring main,
Strife in this house delights to dwell,
And Murder shrieks with hideous yell.

CLYTEMNESTRA, ELECTRA, CHORUS.

CLYT. At large then thou art ranging, I perceive,
Ægisthus absent, who within these gates
Always restrain'd thee, that thou might'st not shame
Thy friends: now free from his control, to me
Thou show'st no reverence; but thy froward tongue
Oft speaks of me as haughty, and unjust
In my commands, and insolent to thee,
And thine. My nature knows not insolence:
Nor speak I harshly to thee, but provoked
By thy repeated harshness, and reproach,
That by my hand thy father died. (Thy plea

This only made) By me thy father died;
I know it well, nor shall deny the deed;
For justice struck the blow, nor I alone;
And thee, if wisdom ruled thee, it behoved
To aid me: for thy father, thus bewail'd,
Alone of all the Grecians steel'd his heart
To sacrifice thy sister to the gods:
He never felt, like me, a mother's throes.
I urge not that: but tell me for what cause
Or for whose sake he bade this victim bleed.
Say'st thou for Greece? No right had Greece to slay
My child. Or was it for his brother's sake?
He slew my daughter: should not I repay
Such deeds with just revenge? Had *he* no child?
Had he not two? And these with juster right
Had been devoted, as of parents born
Whose cause avenging Greece embark'd for Troy.
Or had th' infernal god more keen desire
To gorge him with my children, than with hers?
Or was this barbarous father's love grown cool
To children born of me, but warm to those
Born to his brother? Was not this the part
Of an unfeeling father, to all sense
Of goodness lost? I think so, though I speak
What to thy thoughts is adverse; so my child
That died would speak, could she her voice regain.
Hence for this deed no sorrow, no remorse
Hath ever touch'd my heart. To thee perchance
I seem to judge amiss: but weigh things well,
Let justice hold the beam, then blame thy friends.

ELEC. Thou wilt not say this harshness was provoked
Now by my harsh reproach. But, grant me leave,

L. 537. Hesiod says that, besides Hermione, Menelaus had a son, named Nicostratus, by Helena. Sophocles availed himself of this authority.

Of my dead father, and my sister's death,
As truth and reason prompt me, I will speak.
CLYT. Thou hast my leave: and hadst thou always thus
Address'd me, nothing harsh had been replied.
ELEC. Then I will speak. My father by thy hand
Was slain: thou freely dost avow the deed.
And can there be a deed of blacker stain,
E'en though he justly died? But I will say
That not with justice didst thou strike the blow.
No: the persuasions of that wicked man,
Thy base compeer in guilt, allured thee. Ask
The huntress queen Diana, why so long
At Aulis vengeful she restrain'd the winds;
Or I will tell thee; her thou may'st not ask.
My father, sporting in her sacred grove,
Once roused a dappled Hart, that bore aloft
His branching horns; and glorying in the prize
Utter'd some vaunting words: at these incensed
The daughter of Latona in that port
Detain'd the fleet of Greece, that for her Hart
A recompense my father might present
His daughter: to the goddess thus she fell
A victim; else the fleet had been detain'd
Moor'd in that bay, and not a gale had swell'd
Their sails for Troy, or to the ports of Greece.
For this, reluctant and by sad constraint,
He sacrificed his daughter, just to Greece,
Not for his brother's sake. But (to allow
Thy plea) to grace the Spartan had his will
Been to the deed assenting, for that cause
Behoved it thee to slay him? By what right?
Take heed thou givest not sanction to a law
'Mongst mortals, which with vengeance will recoil
On thine own head. If blood must be repaid

With blood, if justice doth her office, thou
The first must die. Take heed, nor urge a plea
Of no avail. But tell me, if thy will
Assents to tell me, why dost thou persist
In actions most disgraceful to thy fame?
Why with a blood-stain'd murderer share thy couch,
Thy vile associate in my father's death?
How canst thou bear him children, and expose
As outcasts those, who from an hallow'd bed
Sprung hallow'd? How can I approve these things?
Or wilt thou say that for thy daughter's death
These deeds are done to satiate thy revenge?
Shame on thee if thou say'st so; for to wed
An hostile ruffian for a daughter's sake,
Throws a foul stain on honour. But thy soul
Rejects monition: ever on thy tongue
Is this complaint, that we with rude reproach
Insult our mother: Am I then thy child?
Rather thy slave, and lead a servile life,
Ever beneath the yoke of ills oppress'd
By thee and thy compeer. Thy other child,
The poor Orestes, scarce escaped thy hand,
With misery, exiled from his country, lives.
Oft dost thou taunt me that I train the Youth
To vengeance on thee: be thou well assured
This I had done, had I the pow'r. Now go,
Proclaim me to the world as base of soul,
As insolent of tongue, as lost to shame:
If in these arts I am expert, they show
That nor thy nature I disgrace, nor thee.

CHOR. I see she burns with anger: whether just
That anger, no regard, I see, is paid.

CLYT. And what regard from me to her is due,
Who with such rude revilings dares insult

And at that age, her mother? What base deed
Would she not dare unblushing to attempt?

ELEC. At what hath pass'd, believe me, I now blush.
Whate'er thy thought, I am not now to learn
That nor my age, nor me these things become:
But thy unkindness, and thy deeds, by force
Constrain me. By the base base deeds are taught.

CLYT. Unblushing insolence! Do I, my words,
My deeds, give birth to thy intemperate speech?

ELEC. It is thy speech, not mine; for thine the deed;
And deeds will always find according speech.

CLYT. Now by Diana, when Ægisthus comes,
This arrogance unpunish'd shall not pass.

ELEC. I had thy leave to speak; yet see, with rage
Thou art inflamed: thy passion will not hear.

CLYT. Because thou hadst my leave to speak thy thoughts,
Wilt thou disturb me with ill-omen'd words,
Nor suffer my oblations to the gods?

ELEC. I suffer, I encourage, I approve;
Present thy offerings; blame my voice no more;
No word the holy silence shall disturb.

CLYT. Thou, my attendant, the oblations bring
Of the earth's various fruits, that I may pour
My pray'rs to royal Phœbus, from my soul
To chase the terrors that appal me now.

O thou, who hold'st thy guardian station here,
Now, Phœbus, hear the whispers of my voice:
I am not 'mongst my friends; nor to the light,
While she is near, behoves me all unfold.
By envy moved her ever-clamorous tongue
Through all the city wild reports would spread.
Hear me e'en thus; thus low must be my voice.
The nightly visions of this doubtful dream,

If they portend me good, Lycæan king,
Bring thou to good effect: if ill, avert
That ill from me, and turn it on my foes!
From this high state if treacherous malice works
To sink me, crush, oh crush the close design,
Protect me always in this life of bliss,
To sway the sceptre, and to rule the house
Of the Atridæ, happy in those friends
Whose pleasing converse daily I enjoy,
And in those children, who ne'er grieve my heart
With wayward clamours and malignant hate.
Hear me, Lycæan Phœbus, favouring hear,
Grant to us all, as we implore thy grace:
All other things, though silence chains my tongue,
Thou, as a god, my soul confides, must know:
Nought from the sons of Jove can be conceal'd.

ATTENDANT, CLYTEMNESTRA, ELECTRA, CHORUS.

ATT. From you, ye female Argives, may I learn,
Is this the mansion of Mycenæ's king?
CHOR. Stranger, it is: thou hast conjectured well.
ATT. And this, if not amiss I judge, his queen:
For in her port are dignity and grace.
CHOR. Well hast thou mark'd our sovereign: this is she.
ATT. Hail queen. I bring thee grateful tidings, sent
By one to thee and to Ægisthus dear.
CLYT. I welcome thy address, But say by whom,
Bearing this friendly message, thou art sent.
ATT. From Phanoteus of Phocis, mighty queen:
Important are the tidings which he sends.
CLYT. What are they, stranger? Tell me: from a friend
Nothing but friendly tidings wilt thou bring.
ATT. To speak in brief, Orestes is no more.

ELEC. O wretched me! This day I am undone.
CLYT. What say'st thou, stranger, what? Regard not her.
ATT. Again I say Orestes is no more.
ELEC. Then I am nothing; I too am no more.
CLYT. Attend thou to thine own concerns. To me
Speak truly, stranger; tell me how he died.
ATT. And therefore was I sent: hear then the whole.
The glorious contest of the Grecian games
Led him to Delphi: when the herald's voice
Loudly proclaim'd the first, the rapid race,
He enter'd with a splendor that from all
Drew wonder and applause: that graceful form
Deceived not expectation; he first reach'd
The goal, and bore the honour'd prize away.
But, of his many deeds to speak in brief,
In skill and strength one equal I ne'er saw.
Know then at once 'midst the heroic games
In the five contests, as by law ordain'd,
To him the praise of conquest was assign'd,
By the presiding umpires' voice announced.
Applauding Greece the happy victor hail'd,
Call'd him an Argive, sounding loud his name,
Orestes, son of Agamemnon once
The leader of th' illustrious host of Greece.
Such was this day: but when some god decrees
His doom, not e'en the mighty can escape.
The next day's contest was the rapid course
Of rolling chariots. With the orient sun
Ardent 'midst many rivals he advanced;

L. 704. These five contests, the Pentathlon, consisted of Leaping, the Foot-race, throwing the Quoit, throwing the Spear, and Wrestling,

"Αλμα, Ποδωκείην, Δίσκον, Ἄκοντα, Πάλην.

The Diaulus was a foot-race, in which the competitors turned round a pillar at the end of the stadium, and ran back to the barrier from which they started.

One an Achæan, one from Sparta, two
From Libya, skill'd to rule the harness'd car:
With these Orestes, his Thessalian mares
Restraining: From Ætolia came a youth,
His coursers colour'd like the burnish'd gold:
Nor was Magnesia wanting to the course:
Proud of his snow white steeds an Ænian came,
One came from Athens built by hands divine;
The list of heroes a Bœotian closed.
Now standing where th' appointed umpires fix'd
By lot their stations, and arranged the cars,
Soon as the trumpet gave the signal, swift
They bounded from the barrier, cheer'd their steeds,
And tost their slacken'd reins; the rolling wheels
With thunder shook the plain, and clouds of dust
Rose to the skies. Together all were mix'd,
Nor spared the lash, impatient each to pass
The others axle and high-snorting steeds;
For o'er their backs and summits of the wheels
Their whitening foam they threw, and fiery breath.
But ever, the last pillar as he reach'd,
He drew his axle nigh, for on the right
He gave his steed the reins, the nearer curb'd.
Thus far the rapid cars roll'd on erect;
Till now the Ænian's wild unmanaged steeds
Broke from the ground, and at the seventh return
Reckless their fronts with headstrong fury dash'd

L. 736. The chariot-race was not always of the same length; it consisted at different times of four, of seven, of eight, of twelve courses or rounds. Mr. West fixes this race, in which Orestes is said to have contended, at eight. At each round great skill and dexterity were shown in turning at the last pillar, the κάμμα; this was done by drawing in the reins of the near horse, and giving the other free scope.

L. 742. This was the consequence of their running on the inside of the pillar, round which the Lybian had turned.

Against the Lybian chariot. From this shock
Of one, wheel clash'd with shatter'd wheel, and fell;
The wreck of cars fill'd all the Phocian plain.
This saw th' Athenian, and, with skilful hand
Wheeling aloof, his courser's speed restrain'd,
And pass'd the wide confusion of the storm
Roll'd in the middle course. His steeds behind
Orestes drove, the last, but high in hope
Foremost to reach the goal: but when he saw
One only left his rival for the prize,
With sharper voice he cheer'd his flying mares,
And follow'd close. Now side by side they drove,
Now one, the other now, his coursers' heads
Push'd forward. All his other courses safe
Now pass'd, firm in his car, its wheels erect,
Orestes on the left relax'd the rein,
And, as his courser round the pillar wheel'd,
Dash'd unawares against it; in the nave
The axle broke, and roll'd him o'er the car
Entangled in the reins: his steeds uncheck'd
Break forth at large, and bound amidst the course.
But when th' assembly saw him from the car
Hurl'd headlong, they with cries deplored the youth,
His gallant actions, and his hapless fate,
As low his head was trail'd along the ground.
And now th' attendant train, his fiery steeds
Scarce check'd, unbound him so deform'd with gore
That not a friend could know the mangled corse.
The funeral pile was raised, the body burn'd,
And to some Phocians is the charge assign'd
With speed to his paternal land to bear
The poor cold ashes of the mighty man
Closed in a narrow urn, that this dear land,
Which gave him birth, may bear his honour'd tomb.

These, lady, are the tidings which I bring,
How mournful to relate! But to behold,
As we beheld it—misery never show'd
Scene of like horror to my aching eyes.

CHOR. Alas, alas! Our lord's imperial stem,
Honour'd so long, is perish'd from its roots.

CLYT. What an event is this! Almighty Jove,
Shall I with joy receive it, or with grief?
It brings advantage: yet it grieves my soul
To gain the safety of my life by ills

ATT. Why at these tidings, lady, sink with grief?

CLYT. Nature will touch a mother: though with wrongs
Her heart be rent, she cannot hate her child.

ATT. Unthank'd is he that brings unwelcome news.

CLYT. Why should'st thou say unwelcome and unthank'd?
It is not so: thou bring'st me certain proofs
That he is dead, who, born of me, renounced
My breasts, and all a mother's nurturing care,
Became a fugitive, with strangers lived,
And never saw me since he left this land,
But charged his father's murder on my head,
And menaced fierce revenge; so that by night
Sleep never closed mine eyes, nor sweet repose
By day was mine; but each imperious hour
Appall'd me as a victim mark'd for death.
But now, this day, my terrors are no more
From her, or him; she was the greater pest,
A fury nourish'd in my house, that wish'd
To lap my blood: but from their threats secure
I now shall pass my fearless life in peace.

ELEC. A wretched me! I now have cause to mourn
Thy wretched fate, Orestes, e'en in death
Thus taunted by a mother. Is this well?

CLYT. Not well with thee: but it is well with him.

ELEC. Hear, Nemesis, avenger of the dead!
CLYT. She heard whom she should hear, and well decreed.
ELEC. Triumph, insult; for prosperous is thy state.
CLYT. That state wilt thou and thy Orestes sink?
ELEC. No: we are sunk, and therefore sink not thee.
CLYT. Great is thy merit, stranger, great thy meed,
If thou hast check'd that ever-clamourous tongue.
ATT. Now, if these things are well, I would depart.
CLYT. Not so; that would reflect disgrace on me,
And on the friend who sent thee. Go thou in,
And leave her here with clamourous grief to wail
The ruin which hath sunk her, and her friends.

ELECTRA, CHORUS.

ELEC. Did this unnatural mother show one sign
Of grief or pity? Did she shed a tear?
Or once lament a son by such a fate
Cut off? She left us with a smile of joy.
My dear Orestes, how hast thou destroy'd
Thy poor unhappy sister by thy death!
Thou hast torn from me the fond hope, which cheer'd
Alone my sinking mind, that thou wouldst live,
Live to avenge my father's death, and me,
Unhappy me. Now whither shall I go?
Now I am left alone; deprived of thee,
And of my father, I must be again
A slave to those whom most my soul abhors,
The murderers of my father. Is this well?
But never from this moment will I deign
To dwell with them: no, stretch'd before this gate,
Unfriended, I will pine my life away:

L. 811. There is great force in this invocation of Nemesis, as it was the office of that goddess to protect the relics and the memory of the dead. The reply of Clytemnestra alludes to Iphigenia.

And let them kill me, if this gives offence
To those who here are lords: death were a grace,
And life a grief: I have no wish to live.

CHOR. Where are the thunders of almighty Jove?
Where the resplendent Sun? If they behold,
And calmly in oblivion wrap these things?

Electra weeps.

CHOR. Why flow thy tears?

Electra weeps and laments aloud.

CHOR. Ah, mitigate thy grief!

ELEC. Why wilt thou thus oppress me? From the dead,
Already sunk to the infernal realms,
To speak of hope turns sorrow to despair.

CHOR. Amphiaraus, I know the prophet-king,
Was for the golden bracelets to those realms
Sunk by a woman's falsehood; yet he reigns
Beneath the earth, by all the shades revered.

Electra weeps.

CHOR. How mournful! for destructive was the deed.

ELEC. And on her vengeance fell.

CHOR. It fell severe.

ELEC. I know it, yes, I know it; 'midst his grief
A warm avenger rose: but I have none,
I now have none, for mine is snatch'd away.

CHOR. Unhappy virgin, mournful are thy ills.

ELEC. I feel them all, an aggregated mass,
Of various, endless, dreadful, hated griefs.

CHOR. We see thou hast abundant cause of grief.

ELEC. With comfort then mislead my sense no more;
For from my brother, from th' illustrious son
Of my great father, I no more have hope.

CHOR. Death to all mortals is the common doom.

ELEC. What, when the fiery-footed steeds contend
For conquest, as that poor lamented Youth

To perish, so entangled in the reins!

CHOR. This ill, which no presaging thought, no care——

ELEC. No care indeed, if in a foreign land
He lies neglected, to his mangled corse
No mournful office by these hands perform'd,
Without a tomb, without my streaming tears.

CHRYSOTHEMIS, ELECTRA, CHORUS.

CHRY. Joy, my dear sister, wings my quick return,
And with more speed than decency allows.
I bring thee joy, and rest from all the ills
Beneath whose anguish thou so long hast groan'd.

ELEC. What hast thou found to mitigate my griefs,
Which never lenient medicine can heal?

CHRY. Orestes is return'd; know that from me,
As certain as thine eyes behold me here.

ELEC. Thy own misfortunes sure have hurt thy sense,
Or makest thou at thy ills, and mine, a mock?

CHRY. No, by the gods that guard our father's house,
This is no mock: Orestes now is here.

ELEC. And from what mortal hath thine ear received
This vain report, which wins thy firm belief?

CHRY. Not from another, from myself I speak;
I saw th' undoubted proofs, and thence believe.

ELEC. What proof, what confirmation hast thou seen,
Which warms thy soul with this distemper'd heat?

CHRY. Nay, by the gods, my sister, hear me; hear
The whole; and of my reason then pronounce.

ELEC. Well, if in speaking thou hast pleasure, speak.

CHRY. Then I will tell thee all that I beheld.
My father's honour'd tomb as I approach'd,
White on the summit of the mound I saw
Large streams of milk late pour'd; the sepulchre,
Wherein he lies inurn'd, with wreaths of flow'rs,

Glowing in all their various dies, hung round.
I saw, and wonder'd, and on each side turn'd
Mine eyes, if any mortal might be nigh;
But all was still: then nearer I approach'd
The tomb, and on the pyre's remotest verge
Saw crisped locks fresh severed from the head.
Forthwith Orestes rush'd upon my thought,
Such as my mind had imaged him of old;
And these I deem'd the pledges of the Youth
Dear to my heart: I took them in my hands,
And from my eyes gush'd tears; account not these
Omens of ill, for they were tears of joy.
And now, as then, my soul is well assured
That from him only could these honours come:
For to what mortal else, save thee or me,
Could this accord? I did it not, I know,
Nor thou; for from this house thou darest not move
E'en to the gods. Nor doth my mother's soul

L. 917. Notwithstanding the decent reservedness of female manners in ancient Greece, the Virgins were not only allowed to be present at certain religious solemnities, but their attendance was necessary: they formed a distinguished part in the sacred processions, and were led by some virgin of the highest rank. To be confined to their apartments during the celebration of these magnificent and festal rites was the greatest mortification. Thus the Chorus of Virgins addresses the Electra of Euripides,

The Argives, thus he says, proclaim
Three days of festal rites divine,
And all the Virgins haste to Juno's shrine.

Electra replies,

No more, my friends the gorgeous vest,
Which in her happier hours Electra graced,
No more the gem in gold enchased
With vivid radiance sparkling on my breast,
Delight my mind: my feet no more
The mazy-winding dance shall tread,
No more the train of Argive virgins lead.

L. 193. See also l. 335.

Harbour such thoughts; nor could she do the deed
Unnoticed. These sepulchral honours then
Come from Orestes. Let despair no more
Sink thee, my dearest sister: the same god
O'er the same mortals doth not always rule;
Stern was his pow'r; but now perchance this day
On a firm base shall build our happier state.

ELEC. Alas thy frenzy, how I pity thee!

CHRY. What, in my tidings dost thou not rejoice?

ELEC. Thou know'st not where thou art, nor what thou say'st.

CHRY. Not know what in bright day these eyes beheld!

ELEC. Oh, he is dead, my sister: all thy hopes
In him are vanish'd: look to him no more.

CHRY. Ah wretched me, who hath arrived to bring
These mournful tidings?

ELEC. One, who when he died
Was near, was present.

CHRY. Where is he? My heart
Sinks with astonishment.

ELEC. Within these gates,
And to my mother no unwelcome guest.

CHRY. Unhappy me! What mortal then could bring
These solemn honours to our father's tomb?

ELEC. Some friend, as I conjecture, placed them there,
Memorials of Orestes now no more.

CHRY. O wretched state! Joy wing'd my steps to bear
These tidings to thee: little did I know
What woes were gather'd round us: when I came,
In their full force our former ills I find,
Their horror heighten'd by more recent griefs.

ELEC. This is our state. But wou'dst thou be advised
By me, thou soon wilt free us from the ills
Which now oppress us.

CHRY. Can I raise the dead

Again to life?

ELEC. I mean not that; my mind
Hath not such frenzy.

CHRY. What wou'dst thou propose
Within my pow'r to aid thee?

ELEC. Dare to act
As I shall give thee charge.

CHRY. If it produce
Aught of advantage, I shall not refuse
My aid.

ELEC. But weigh this well: no great design
Can without toil succeed.

CHRY. I weigh it well;
And far as I have pow'r, will bear it all
With thee.

ELEC. Now hear the purpose of my soul.
The aid of friends (this truth is not unknown
To thee) we have not: the infernal king
Hath snatch'd them from us; and of these deprived
We two are left alone. I, whilst I heard
In youth's fresh vigour that our brother lived,
Fed the fond hope that he would one day come
With vengeance, for his father's murder, arm'd.
He is no more: I now look up to thee,
That, with thy sister join'd, thou wilt be bold,
And kill the bloody author of this deed,
Ægisthus. It behoves me now no more
Aught to conceal from thee. Thus spiritless
How long wilt thou remain? What honest hope
Is left thee yet? To thee is left to mourn,
Of all thy father's treasured wealth deprived;
To thee is left to sigh, and to grow old
So long neglected, unespoused, cut off
From nuptial rites. And hast thou yet an hope

These ever shall be thine? With keener eye
Forward Ægisthus looks, nor will permit
One scion e'er from thee or me to rise,
Which must be fatal to him. Then pursue
My plan of vengeance: thine will be the praise
Of pious reverence to thy father's shade,
And to thy brother in the realms below.
Nay more, thou wilt assert thy noble birth;
Thou wast born free, and free thou wilt be call'd
Thenceforth, and to thy bed some generous Youth,
Worthy thy high-born race, will then aspire;
For all with reverence on that virtue gaze,
Which vindicates its honours. Seest thou not
What glory thou wilt throw round thee and me,
To me assenting? Who, when we appear,
Argive or stranger, with this voice of praise
Will not salute us? "See these sisters, friends,
"These dared to vindicate their father's house;
"These on his foes, though seated on his throne,
"Of their own lives regardless, greatly led
"The pow'rs of vengeance: these should all men love,
"These all should reverence; on the festal days,
"And in the full assemblies, these deserve
"Honour from all; their noble virtue claim
"Such meed." Thus all the world shall sound our praise,
That while we live, and when we die, our fame
Shall never fade. Then listen to my voice,
My dearest sister; for thy father dare,
Dare for thy brother in this work engage;
Redeem me from my ills, redeem thyself;
And know thou this, that to the nobly born
To live dishonour'd is the foulest stain.

CHOR. This is a theme of danger, and requires
Prudence in her that speaks, and her that hears.

CHRY. Greatly behoved her ere she spoke, my friends
(But that intemperate passion rules her mind)
The guard of prudence: this she casts away.
On what high hope depending art thou arm'd
With this fierce daring, and dost call me forth
To act beneath thy guidance? Seest thou not
Thou art a woman, not a man, in strength
Inferior to thy foes; and that each day
A more exalted state their fortune finds,
Whilst ours flows backwards, and to nothing sinks?
A foe so potent who shall dare attack,
And without ruin from his force retreat?
Take heed lest to our present ills we add
A weight of heavier ills, should any hear
This bold discourse; for little would avail,
Little advantage us our glorious fame,
If with disgrace we die; for not in death
Is the most dreadful ill, but when we wish
To die, and have not death within our pow'r.
But I implore thee, ere thou crush us quite
In hideous ruin, and o'er all our race
Bring total desolation, check thy rage;
And this bold converse I will always keep
Secret and undivulged. Do thou restrain
Thy daring spirit, and by time be taught,
Weak as thou art, to sovereign pow'r to yield.

CHOR. Assent: no greater good can mortals gain
Than sage discretion, and a prudent mind.

ELEC. This is not unexpected: well I knew

L. 1026. Chrysothemis well knew that the fear of death would have no influence on her high-spirited sister; she therefore points out circumstances of greater terror. To die, she says, is not the most dreadful ill; for not death, but the pain and indignity of punishment, from which death would be a desirable refuge, are the miseries most to be dreaded. Her reasoning is pertinent and strong.

That thou with scorn wou'dst spurn what I proposed.
Then shall this hand alone perform the deed,
Nor uneffected leave the glorious work.

CHRY. Oh, had this spirit, when our father died
Been thine! What deeds had then thy hand achieved!

ELEC. Such was my nature then, but less confirm'd
My spirit.

CHRY. May thy spirit through thy life
Remain the same!

ELEC. These cold monitions show
Thou wilt not give me aid.

CHRY. For ill designs
May be repaid with ills.

ELEC. I must applaud
Thy prudence, but abhor thy timid mind.

CHRY. This I can bear to hear: and when to me
Thou givest applause——

ELEC. Never: applause from me
Thou never shalt receive.

CHRY. That in its length
Of course will time decide.

ELEC. Away; in thee
I have no aid.

CHRY. Thou hast, were but thy hand
Open to reason.

ELEC. To thy mother go,
Tell her these things.

CHRY. I harbour not such hate
Against thee.

ELEC. Yet thy mind can harbour thoughts
To lead me to disgrace.

CHRY. Not to disgrace,
But prudence.

ELEC. Must I follow what to thee
Seems right?

CHRY. When reason does her office, thou
Shalt be my guide.
ELEC. What shame to speak so well,
And act so ill!
CHRY. Thou clearly hast explain'd
Thy own disease.
ELEC. What, seem I not to speak
With justice?
CHRY. There are times when justice leads
To ruin.
ELEC. By such laws I will not live.
CHRY. But if thou dost these things, thou wilt applaud
Me, and my prudence.
ELEC. These things I will do,
Nothing appall'd by thee.
CHRY. Art thou resolved?
And will no counsel move thee?
ELEC. To my soul
Ill counsels are most hateful.
CHRY. Much averse
Thy mind appears to all I say.
ELEC. By long
Deliberate thought my purpose firm is fix'd.
CHRY. I leave thee, since thy mind with scorn rejects
My words, nor can I favour thy designs.
ELEC. Go then; and wish it with what warmth thou may'st,
I never will hold converse with thee more.
Folly alone a thing so slight would court.
CHRY. This may thy mind think wisdom; think so still:
But 'midst thy sufferings thou wilt deem me wise.

ELECTRA, CHORUS.

CHORUS.

STRO. 1. Mark you the birds that skim the air,

O'er their full nests they wave the busy wing,
By nature taught with pious care
Food to their callow young to bring,
To swell their plumes, and fit them for the skies.
Is man in nature's lore thus wise?
But, by the Thunderer's angry flame,
By Themis on her heavenly throne sublime,
Vengeance shall soon o'ertake the crime.
O thou, who fill'st this world, wide Fame,
Bear hence thy joyless voice of woe,
And fill with accents dread the world below!

ANTIS. 1. There 'midst the dead th' Atridæ tell
That guilt triumphant in their house remains;
That there the screaming Furies dwell;
That Discord 'twixt the sisters reigns.
Toss'd in the storms of fate, alone, betray'd,
Electra sighs in vain for aid;
Still for her father pours her tears,
Still in wild, melancholy notes complains,
Like Philomela's mournful strains:
No rage of tyrant pow'r she fears:
Content in death to close her eyes
These furies might her vengeful hand surprise.

STRO. 2. Thus low sinks one of high-born race?
Thou art not sunk; to rise be thine:
The noble soul will ne'er disgrace
The glories of its ancient line;
Nor, when misfortune darkens round,
Obscure and dead to fame be found.
O'er thee, unhappy, generous maid,
Hath misery cast her baleful shade;
That shade thy choice, through high disdain,
Of guilt and all her gorgeous train,
Aspiring to enrich thy name

With wisdom's and with virtue's fame.

ANTIS. 2. Oh may'st thou live in royal state,
Triumphant o'er thy prostrate foes,
As now beneath their hand thy fate
Hath sunk thee in disgrace and woes!
For I have seen thy generous soul
Burst from misfortune's harsh control;
Have seen thee with a fix'd disdain
Advance against her threat'ning train,
Bearing the high heroic thought
By heav'n-descended justice taught,
And all the firm mind's holy fires
Which piety to Jove inspires.

ORESTES, PYLADES, ELECTRA, CHORUS.

ORES. Say, female Argives, are we well inform'd,
Our steps unerring guided as we wish?

CHOR. What wou'dst thou ask? Why hither art thou come?

ORES. I seek the mansion where Ægisthus dwells.

CHOR. Right are thy steps: no blame thy guide deserves.

ORES. To those within which of you will announce
Our presence, charged in common with affairs
Of no unwelcome nature to your lords?

CHOR. She, as by birth nearest to them allied.

ORES. Go, lady, let them be with speed inform'd
That men from Phocis sent Ægisthus seek.

ELEC. Unhappy me! Bring you undoubted proofs
Of that report, which reach'd our ears before?

ORES. I know not: of Orestes is my charge
To speak, by aged Strophius hither sent.

ELEC. What, stranger? How am I oppress'd with fear!

ORES. Of the dead youth the poor remains we bear,
As thou may'st see, in this small vase enclosed.

ELEC. Then I indeed am wretched: now my grief

Is certain; it is brought before my eyes.

ORES. If for the poor Orestes flow thy tears,
Know that within this urn his body lies.

ELEC. Now by the gods, O stranger, if this vase
Contain Orestes, give it to my hands;
That o'er his ashes as I pour my tears,
Myself and all my race I may bewail.

ORES. Whoe'er she be, entrust it to her hands;
For not in hatred makes she this request,
But as a friend, or one by blood allied.

ELEC. Thou sad memorial, now the sole remains
Of what was once Orestes, to my heart
Most dear, with other hopes I sent thee hence,
Not to receive thee thus; for in my hands
I bear thee, nothing now; a splendid Youth,
To glory born, I sent thee from this house.
Oh hadst thou died, ere by these hands preserved,
And, snatch'd from slaughter, to a foreign land
I sent thee! Hadst thou died in that sad day,
Some little portion of thy father's tomb
Thou wou'dst have shared: but thou hast perish'd now
Far from thy house, and from thy country far,
A wandering exile, from thy sister far.
Nor in the cleansing lavers did I bathe
With these fond hands thy corse, nor, as became
A sister, bear from the consuming flames
The mournful burden. By a stranger's hands
These duties paid, thou comest a little dust
Closed in a little urn. Unhappy me,
How vain is all my former nurturing care,
All the sweet toil for thee employ'd, how lost!
E'en for thy mother thou didst never show
More fondness than for me; no menial hand
Around thee was engaged; thou wast my charge,
And thy fond tongue still lisp'd thy sister's name.

All these endearments in one day are lost,
With thee they died; thou, like a rushing storm
Hast pass'd away, and with thee swept them all.
My father is no more, I am no more,
And death hath snatch'd thee hence; our foes exult;
My mother, how unworthy of that name!
Is wild with joy: yet secret message oft
Aforetime hast thou sent, that thou wou'dst come
Dreadful in vengeance; but unhappy fate,
Thy fate and mine, hath check'd the great intent,
And, for my loved Orestes, sent thee thus,
Cold ashes, and an unavailing shade.
Wretched remains! And what a wretch am I!
Thus art thou come? How mournful! Woe is me!
What ruin on thy sister hast thou brought!
Yes, dear Orestes, ruin on my head
Thy death hath brought. O miserable me!
Receive me then within thy sheltering urn.
Nothing to nothing; that henceforth with thee
I in the realms beneath may ever dwell.
For whilst thou here hadst life, with thee I shared
One common fortune: now it is my wish
In death to share thy tomb. The dead are free
From all the various woes of mortal life.

CHOR. Thou from a mortal father drew'st thy birth;
Thence be admonish'd: thy Orestes too
Was mortal; let that thought assuage thy grief.
Death is the debt of nature all must pay.

ORES. Oh, I must speak; to my distracted thoughts
I must give utterance; struggling in my breast
These strong emotions will break forth in words.

ELEC. What grief is thine? Why this impassion'd speech?

ORES. See I in thee Electra's honour'd form?

ELEC. I am Electra, and a very wretch.

ORES. Ah, my heart bleeds to see thee thus.

ELEC. For me
Why, stranger, dost thou grieve?
ORES. Oh, how disgraced
With foul and impious treatment!
ELEC. Such my state,
Such as by thee deplored.
ORES. Of nuptial rites
Deprived, and train'd to misery!
ELEC. Thus on me
Why dost thou gaze, and sigh?
ORES. I till this hour
Knew nothing of my ills.
ELEC. How from my words
Dost thou now know them?
ORES. I behold thee now
In many ills conspicuous.
ELEC. Of my ills
Thou seest but few.
ORES. How more abhorr'd than these
Can I behold?
ELEC. With murderers that I dwell
By sad constraint.
ORES. Murderers of whom? What ill
Doth this denote?
ELEC. My father: and to them
I live perforce a slave.
ORES. By whom compell'd
To this necessity?
ELEC. A mother's name
She bears; a mother's tenderness for me
She never felt.
ORES. How? Cruel is her hand?
Or doth she feed thee 'mongst her slaves?
ELEC. E'en thus
She treats me, and with every barbarous ill.

ORES. Has thou no friend to aid thee? From such wrongs
None to protect thee?
ELEC. None; I had a friend,
His ashes thou hast brought.
ORES. Thy wretched state
With pity I behold.
ELEC. Of all mankind
Thou alone pityest me.
ORES. For I alone
Am come with sorrow for thy sufferings moved.
ELEC. Art thou by blood allied?
ORES. If these were friends,
I would speak freely.
ELEC. Speak then: they are friends
In whom thou may'st confide.
ORES. Give back that urn
And thou shalt know the whole.
ELEC. Oh, by the gods,
Deal not thus with me!
ORES. Let my words prevail;
No ill do they intend thee.
ELEC. This dear pledge
I pray thee take not from me.
ORES. To thy pray'r
I cannot yield.
ELEC. How wretched shall I be,
If, loved Orestes, of thy tomb deprived!
ORES. Speak words of happier omen; for no cause
Hast thou to mourn.
ELEC. Have I no cause to mourn
A brother's death?
ORES. Thy state it suits not thus
To speak.
ELEC. Am I unworthy of the dead?

ORES. Of none art thou unworthy: but to thee
This now is no concern.
ELEC. Not though I bear
His ashes in this urn!
ORES. That was a tale
Framed to deceive. Orestes lies not there.
ELEC. Where then is my unhappy brother's tomb?
ORES. It is not: for the living hath no tomb.
ELEC. Young man, what say'st thou?
ORES. Nothing false I speak.
ELEC. Doth he then live?
ORES. If here I stand alive.
ELEC. Art thou Orestes?
ORES. Mark this signet well;
It was my father's: this will prove my truth.
ELEC. O welcome day!
ORES. Most welcome to us both.
ELEC. Is it thy voice I hear? Art thou then come?
And in these arms Orestes do I hold?
ORES. And henceforth ever may'st thou hold him thus!
ELEC. Ye daughters of Mycenæ, my loved friends,
You see Orestes but by fiction dead,
And by that honest fiction thus preserved.
CHOR. We see him; in thy fortune we are blest,
And tears of joy steal trickling from our eyes.
ELEC. Thou gem, thou offspring of the dearest man,
To me for ever dear, art thou then come——
Thus hast thou found—at length art thou arrived—
And dost thou see whom thou hast wish'd to see!
ORES. Behold me here: but check thy transports, wait
In silence the event.
ELEC. Why silent wait?
ORES. Within these hostile gates lest any hear.
ELEC. Now by Diana, chaste unconquer'd queen,

My soul disdains to tremble at a rout
Of helpless women here for ever throng'd.

ORES. Yet women sometimes feel the martial flame,
And greatly dare: of this thou hast strong proof.

ELEC. Oh, thou hast touch'd upon a dreadful ill,
For ever open to the light of heav'n,
Inexpiable, monstrous, from the mind
Never to be effaced, our mournful lot.

ORES. I know it well; and when the proper time
Shall warn me, will remember the foul deed.

ELEC. All times to me are proper, and all times
Warn me to speak what justly I may speak:
Scarce is the liberty of speech now mine.

ORES. Preserve that liberty, by knowing well
This is no time to give thy speech free scope.

ELEC. Hath silence then such merit, that my words
Must yield to it, whilst thou art in my sight,
Thus unexpected, thus beyond my hopes?

ORES. Soon as the gods commanded me, I came.

ELEC. This to my former pleasure gives new life:
If by the mandate of the gods thou comest,
That gives a presage of their heav'nly aid.

ORES. I would not check thy pleasure; but I fear
Its wild excess thy reason will o'erpow'r.

ELEC. After such length of time since thou hast deign'd
To make me happy with thy dear return,
Do not, since thou hast found me thus oppress'd
With many sorrows, do not take from me
The heart-felt pleasure which thy presence gives.

ORES. That pleasure none shall dare to take from thee.

ELEC. Dost thou assent?

ORES. How can I but assent?

ELEC. O my loved friends, I hear that pleasing voice
I could not hope to hear. But when I heard

News of thy death, I gave my grief no voice,
Nor rent the air with mournful cries: but now
I hold thee, that dear aspect now I view,
Which in my ills I never could forget——

ORES. These words of transport for awhile forbear;
Nor tell me that my mother is most vile;
Nor that Ægisthus with a lavish hand
In senseless riot wastes my father's wealth.
Such converse would engage th' important time,
Preventing action. With the present hour
What bests accords inform me: like myself
Shall I appear, or laying secret snares
Crush our insulting foes? But take thou heed,
Nor, when we enter, let thy mother see
A smile of gladness bright'ning on thy face:
But wear the marks of sorrow, as my death
Were real: when the work shall be achieved,
Then we may smile, and freely show our joy.

ELEC. Thy will, my brother, shall in this be guide
To mine: from thee this pleasure I received,
It comes not from my stores: nor would I grieve
Thy heart e'en for a moment, might I gain
The greatest prize: ill thus should I advance
Our present fortune. Well to thee is known
The state, as we could wish it, of this house,
Ægisthus absent, and my mother here.
Nor fear that she will see a smile of joy
Bright'ning my face; to her I still must wear
The gloom of deep-fix'd hatred; and my tears,
Since first I saw thee, have not ceased to flow;
But they are tears of joy. How should they cease?
For in one instant I have seen thee dead,
And living. These things so surpass my thought,
That should my father from the dead arise,

I should not think it a mere shadowy form,
I would believe I saw the real man.
Since on this dangerous task thou art return'd,
Be the whole conduct thine. Had I been left
Alone, I had not fail'd myself to save
With glory, or with glory to have died.

ORES. I wish thee to be silent, for I hear
The steps of one advancing to these gates.

ELEC. Strangers, go in: you bear what in the house
None will reject, nor will receive with joy.

ATTENDANT, ORESTES, PYLADES, ELECTRA, CHORUS.

ATT. What madness this? Is life no more your care?
Where is your prudence? Where your heedful thought
Of danger? Know you not that you now stand
Not on the verge, but in the midst of ills,
The greatest ills? And had not I long watch'd
Within this portal, your designs had found
An entrance ere yourselves; my cautious care
To this I have opposed. But now break off
Your long discourse, and these wild cries of joy,
And enter: the important moment calls
For action: mischief lurks beneath delay.

ORES. How, when I enter, shall I find the state
Of things within?

ATT. As thou cou'dst wish: not one
Is there who knows thee.

ORES. Didst thou, as behoved,
Report me dead?

L. 1356. This is artfully said. As Electra knew not who was coming to the gates, she addresses Orestes and his friend as strangers, and bids them enter.—Camerar.—The latter part of her speech has that ambiguity, so frequent in the Grecian Drama, "where more is meant than meets the ear."

ATT. Though thou art living here,
There thou art deem'd one of the shades below.
ORES. Do they rejoice at this? What did they say?
ATT. First do the deed, then thou shalt know. With them
All now is well, e'en things that are not well.
ELEC. Who, I conjure thee tell me, is this man?
ORE. Dost thou not know——
ELEC. My mind retains no trace.
ORES. Him, to whose hands assign'd thy prudent care
In secret sent me to the Phocian realms?
ELEC. Is this the man, when my lov'd father fell
'Mongst many faithless only faithful found?
ORES. This is the man: but ask me now no more.
ELEC. O thou dear light! Preserver of the house
Of Agamemnon, sole preserver! How
Art thou come back? Art thou that faithful man,
Who from a thousand threatening ills preserved
My brother and myself? Blest be thy hands
That bore him hence. How pleasant are the steps
Of thy return! But when we late conversed,
Why keep thyself unknown? Why not disclose
The ancient friend? Why pierce my heart with words
When thou hadst deeds to fill my soul with joy?
Hail, O my father! For methinks I see
My father: hail! Of all mankind this day
Thee have I hated most, and most have loved.
ATT. Cease thy inquiries. What remains untold
The rolling course of many nights and days
Will show thee. Now, O princes, is the time
To act; now Clytemnestra is alone;
Now not a man is in the house; if now
You make delay, with others wiser far
Than these, and more in number, you must fight.
ORES. Not words, my Pylades, but deeds must now

Take place: this instant let us enter, first
With reverence bending to my father's gods,
That in this portal have their hallow'd seats.

ELEC. Royal Apollo, hear them, favouring hear;
Me too, for oft before thee have I stood,
Offering with pious hand whate'er was mine
To offer, hear me. Now, Lycæan king,
I bring thee all I have, my pray'rs, my vows,
My adoration: in our great attempt
Propitious give us aid, and show mankind
The vengeance of the gods on impious deeds!

CHORUS.

STRO. See this Mars against his foes
Breathing slaughter furious goes.
Faithful to the scent of blood
On him waits a ravening brood,
Dogs of hell, with eager chase
Train'd the murderer's steps to trace:
On they rush with horrid joy,
Keen, and certain to destroy.
Did not this my soul presage?
Slumbers now his vengeful rage?

ANTIS. See him prompt to aid the dead,
Range these courts with secret tread.
O'er each room his eyes are roll'd,
Scenes of royal pomp, of old
With his father's treasures stor'd.
Fierce he grasps his keen-edged sword.
Hermes, brooking no delay,
Leads him on the destin'd way;
And the great avenger shrouds,
Guileful in a veil of clouds.

ELECTRA, CHORUS.

ELEC. My dearest friends, they now are in the act,

E'en now: in silence then await th' event.
CHOR. How! Tell us all. What are they doing now?
ELEC. A cauldron for the burial she prepares,
And they stand nigh.
CHOR. Why hither art thou come?
ELEC. To watch: that should Ægisthus chance to come,
He may not enter ere they are aware.
CLYT. O miserable me! Beneath this roof [*within.*
Have I no friends? Are none but murderers here?
ELEC. One cries within. Hark! Hear you not my friends?
CHOR. I heard; and shuddering horror chills my blood.
CLYT. Where art thou, O Ægisthus? Wretched me! [*within.*
ELEC. Again that piercing cry!
CLYT. My son, my son [*within.*
Have pity on thy mother!
ELEC. But from thee
He found no pity, none his father found.
CHOR. Unhappy realm! Unhappy race! Now fate
Day after day destroys thee, quite destroys.
CLYT. Oh! I am wounded. [*within.*
ELEC. If thou canst, repeat
That stroke.
CLYT. A wretched me, another wound! [*within.*
ELEC. Oh that Ægisthus had like cause to groan!
CHOR. The curse now hastes to be fulfill'd: they live,
Who lie beneath the earth; and streams of blood
The dead, from those who shed their blood, exact.

ORESTES, PYLADES, ELECTRA, CHORUS.

ELEC. See, they are here, their hands distain'd with blood
From the first victim of their fury pour'd.
I need not ask, Orestes, what is done.
ORES. All is well done within these gates, if well
The Oracle commanded. She is dead,
The wretched woman. Henceforth fear no more

Disgraceful insults from thy mother's pride.
CHOR. Forbear. Ægisthus plainly I perceive.
ELEC. Go back, with speed go back.
ORES. See you this man?
Comes he upon us?
ELEC. He will soon be here;
Rejoicing from the suburbs he returns.
CHOR. Retire within the portal: as before
You well conducted that attempt, so now——
ORES. Fear not: we will effect it to thy wish.
ELEC. Nay, linger not a moment.
ORES. I am gone.

ELECTRA, CHORUS.

ELEC. What here th' occasion calls for, be my care.
This man then—It were well to sooth his ear
With a few gentle words, that he may rush
Without a thought on their avenging swords.

ÆGISTHUS, ELECTRA, CHORUS.

ÆGIS. Where are these Phocian strangers, who, I hear,
Have brought the tidings that amidst the wreck
Of clashing cars Orestes breath'd his last?
Which of you knows? Of thee I ask, of thee,
Thee in times past of soul untamed: as thee
It most imports, thou canst inform me best.
ELEC. Too well I know: I were a stranger else
To what concerns the dearest of my friends.
ÆGIS. Where are the strangers? Tell me.
ELEC. Enter'd here,
And welcome guests.
ÆGIS. What, spoke they of his death
As certain?
ELEC. What convinces more than words,

They brought undoubted proof.

ÆGIS. May I behold
That proof which carries certainty?

ELEC. Thou may'st:
That sight thy envy will not raise.

ÆGIS. Great joy
Thou givest me now: not such hath been thy wont.

ELEC. Go then: if this can give thee joy, rejoice.

ÆGIS. Be silent, and set wide the gates, that all
Of Argos and Mycenæ may behold:
That if a man of them had in his thoughts
Cherish'd vain hopes, he now may view this corse,
And bear my curb; nor, hardening in his pride,
Draw on his head the terrors of my wrath.

ELEC. I know my duty: for by time my mind
Is taught obedience to the sovereign pow'rs.

The gates are thrown open; the body of Clytemnestra lies covered.

ORESTES, PYLADES, ÆGISTHUS, ELECTRA, CHORUS.

ÆGIS. O Jove this is a sight, which hath not fall'n
But to my wish. If Vengeance waits my joy,
I know not. From the corse remove the veil,
That he my lamentations may receive,
For nearly to my blood he was allied.

ORES. Remove it thou: thy office this, not mine,
To view, and kindly to address the dead.

L. 1494. Ægisthus, imagining that these Phocian strangers had brought the dead body of Orestes, expected to find it laid at the entrance of the house, ad limen, such being the general usage of antiquity: under this expectation he commanded the gates to be opened.

L. 1503. It was the office of Ægisthus, as nearly related, to lament over the body of Orestes; on the contrary he expresses an indecent joy: this was an insult to the dead; he recollects himself, and apprehensive of the vengeance of Nemesis, determines upon a friendly address to the deceased.

ÆGIS. I will: thou dost advise me well. Go thou,
Call Clytemnestra. Is she in the house?
ORES. Ay, she is near thee; seek her not elsewhere.
ÆGIS. Ah, what a sight is this! [*removing the veil.*
ORES. Whom dost thou fear?
Or whom not know?
ÆGIS. Ah me, amidst the toils
Of what insidious hunters am I fall'n!
ORES. Dost thou not yet perceive that with the dead,
So deem'd by thee, long converse thou hast held?
ÆGIS. Ah me! too well I know it; and these words
Can from none other but Orestes come.
ORES. Excellent prophet! But thy skill before
Deceived thee.
ÆGIS. I am lost, in ruin sunk:
Yet hear me; let me speak; I will be brief.
ELEC. No: hear him not, my brother; by the gods,
Hear no protracted speech. What would a wretch
Plunged in the midst of evils, and to death
Devoted, profit by a short delay?
No; let him die this instant, and when dead
Obtain such burial as his deeds deserve,
Far from our sight: for all his former wrongs
To me this vengeance only can atone.
ORES. Enter the gates this instant; for not words
Must now decide the contest, but thy life.
ÆGIS. Within these walls why lead me? If the deed
Be just and noble, why in darkness done?
Thy hand is ready, why not kill me here?
ORES. Give not the law to me. Go; where thy hand

L. 1509. By thus sending his attendant away, he is left without assistance.

L. 1527. Ægisthus and Clytemnestra were buried without the city at a little distance from the walls; these murderers being thought unworthy of a tomb in the place where Agamemnon lay. Pausan. Corinthiac.

Murder'd my father, there thy blood shall flow.

ÆGIS. This is of strong necessity: this house
Must see the present and the future ills
Doom'd to the race of Pelops by the fates.

ORES. Ills doom'd to thee: prophetic is my voice.

ÆGIS. Thou canst not from thy father boast this skill.

ORES. No more replies; no more delays: away.

ÆGIS. Lead thou the way.

ORES. Before me thou shalt go.

ÆGIS. Hast thou a fear I should escape thy sword?

ORES. To make death bitter to thee, as thou wouldst
Thou shalt not die: now to command is mine.
Thus by swift-rushing vengeance perish all,
Who dare to violate the sacred laws:
Less frequent then would impious deeds be seen.

CHOR. O race of Atreus, scarce hast thou arrived
Through many sufferings at thy ancient state
Of liberty, by this bold deed achieved!

FINIS.

Printed by NATHANIEL BLISS, Water Lane, London.

2022 B2-1